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Wit and Humor of the Bible

Marion D. Shutter

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WIT AND HUMOR

OF THE

BIBLE.

A LITERARY STUDY.

BY

REV. MARION D. SHUTTER, D. D.

"Bibles laid open; millions of surprises." — *Herbert.*

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Dedication.

TO MY WIFE,
MARY WILKINSON SHUTTER.

PREFACE.

While "many have taken in hand to set forth in order" the pathos and sublimity of the Bible, those literary elements comprised under the title of this book have rarely been mentioned. Feeling that here was a field untraversed, the author of this little volume began an investigation whose results were originally embodied in an article published some years ago in an Eastern review. That article is given in "Poole's Index" as the only one extant upon the subject. Since its publication, additional study has brought to light other examples of the use of Wit and Humor by the writers of the Bible. These later results were embodied in a course of lectures delivered last winter before the students of Lombard University, Galesburg, Ill. They are now given to the public in the present volume. It would be presumptuous to claim that these few pages exhaust the subject. Such a claim the author does not wish to make. Further research would no doubt bring to light instances that have escaped him. It is hoped, however, that these studies may be sufficiently complete to awaken interest in a long-neglected side of our sacred literature.

MARION D. SHUTTER.

Minneapolis, Minn., Dec. 24, 1892.
First Universalist Church.

INTRODUCTORY.

"There is still one question before us. If humor be what we have claimed for it, not a mere farce, but the depicting of the whole of human life, then we should expect that the highest literature should be found to contain it. We should expect to find it everywhere; that it should satisfy all that desire which a reading in theology, or philosophy, or science, or history, or a study in art, has created in man. Are there, then, any great books, or still more any great forces in human life which seem devoid of it? Is there any humor in the gospels? This is a dilemma that must be faced; for if humor be life itself, how can human life in its highest development dispense with it?"—*Shorthouse.*

INTRODUCTORY.

"Even St. Paul could invent and enjoy a humorous pun; the proof of which see Galatians V: 12, in the original; so there is high authority for jesting."—*Kirke.*

THE title of this book will no doubt affect many persons unpleasantly at first. "Flat blasphemy!" I can hear some one exclaim, "We have already had the authority of the Bible undermined by critics, and here is a flippant rogue who goes still farther, and assures us that it is nothing more than a jest-book! This is the very climax and culmination of godless folly."

The author makes haste, therefore, to disclaim any intention of irreverence. To cheapen or degrade sacred things, to "depreciate the moral currency," is at the farthest remove from his intention. It is easy enough to take the language of Scripture and use it for coarse and vulgar purposes, and such use deserves the severest censure. It is not to be tolerated. Passages that

have been light and guidance to multitudes, that have brought strength to the tempted, certainty to the doubting and consolation to the bereaved; that have been bread of life to those who have hungered for righteousness, inspiration to the purposeless and help to the needy,—have been turned into sources of merriment to freshen exhausted wit, and season the insipid discourse of stupidity. Persons whose brains are barren of pleasant conceits find no difficulty in so perverting a Scriptural expression as to make the "groundlings" laugh. In no such motives has this volume originated. The title has been chosen and the work which it covers has been done in the spirit of one who loves the Great Book, and who would secure for it an additional claim upon human affection. The studies of the writer have led him into fresh fields and pastures green, where he has gathered many things out of the ordinary that have given the Bible a larger place in his own heart.

No; the Bible is not a collection of jests; nor do we characterize it as a jest-book when we say that it contains Wit and Humor.

These elements are in the Bible, and with good reason. They are not introduced to amuse. They are not intended to dissipate the weariness of an idle hour. They are not designed to produce convulsions of laughter. They are subsidiary to the main theme. They are incidental to the development of religious history and religious thought. They help reveal in their true light the characters who from time to time appear; they show the absurdity of the opposing error and sharpen the arrows with which folly is transfixed. They enhance in many ways the value and power of our Sacred Book.

I.

The Scripture documents may be viewed from several standpoints;—historical, exegetical, theological and literary. One may, for example, study the book of Job to find out the actual basis of fact that underlies it, or for the purpose of ascertaining and systematizing its doctrines, or he may read it as a great dramatic poem, and criticize it by the rules that would apply to any other

dramatic poem. He may go through the Apocalypse, grammar and lexicon in hand, or he may study its flashing imagery as he would that of any other magnificent work of genius. He may read the Psalms as he would the odes of Horace. In these pages the Scriptures are considered simply as Literature. The question of inspiration or authority does not enter. Doctrinal inquiries are set aside. "To understand," says Matthew Arnold, "that the language of the Bible is fluid, passing, literary, is the first step towards a right understanding of the Bible."

The literary character of the Bible is admirably set forth in the following paragraph from a recent critic:

"As a particular book, the Bible is an unequaled source of literary inspiration. As a book of religious truth, it is supreme; but religious truth, without any impairment of its value or obscurity of its meaning, may be studied from the literary standpoint; in fact, in the light of literary criticism, or tested by the usual canons of the scholar, it will appear more sacred, more beautiful, more divine. Never forgetting that it is our manual of religion, it is also the vehicle of the most wonderful literature in human annals, and precedes in importance all others.

There is no book so composite in character and yet so harmonious in plan, so multiplex in styles and yet so educational in rhetoric and logic, so varied in contents and yet so progressive in its philosophy and religion, as the Bible. Taken as a whole, it is massive, comprehensive, a revelation of the Infinite. Studied in its parts, it stimulates single faculties while it ministers nourishment to the whole frame. Its histories are more compact than those of Herodotus, Gibbon or Macaulay; its poetry, whose key is a mystery, quiets Homer, Shakespeare and Tennyson; its prophecies are unique climaxes of wisdom, both in drapery and substance; its biographies excel those of Plutarch, Irving, Carlyle and Boswell; its chronicles of wars are superior to those of Julius Cæsar, Wellington, Napoleon, and Ulysses Grant; its epistles eclipse those of Pliny, Madame Sevigne and Francis Bacon; its laws, in their ethical and spiritual import, are quite beyond Justinian, Blackstone and the English Parliament. Every phasis of literature, every norm of wisdom, is in the Bible. It ministers to all tastes and arouses the slumbering intellects of all who can comprehend the difference between reality and fiction, and who incline to virtue rather than vice. Ruskin confesses his indebtedness to the Bible, Homer and Sir Walter Scott, for his mental discipline; Charles Reade pronounces the characters in Scripture a literary marvel. Matthew Arnold daily read the New Testament in Greek for its style; Milton could not have written Paradise Lost without Genesis; Renan's witchery of style is traceable to the New Testament. Job has taught the poets the art of

construction, and David has sung an undying melody into the ears of the race. The Book of Ruth is the model idyl, and the Books of Esther and Daniel abound in incomparable dramatic elements; Isaiah has plumed the statesman for oratorical flights; Jeremiah has opened the fountains of pathos and sentiment in pathetic souls; Ezekiel has furnished a usable style of judicial denunciation for the criminal lawyer. Of all books, whether rhetoric, logic, vocabulary, poetry, philosophy, history, or whatever be the end, the Bible should be first and most carefully studied, its literary spirit and form should be closely traced and discerned, and its truth should be reverently incorporated into the daily speech, thought and life."

But in this summary there is no mention made of the literary qualities which it is here proposed to consider. They are as completely ignored as if the very suggestion of their presence were profanation.

II.

The presumption is that in such a book, or rather collection of books as the Bible, the elements of Wit and Humor would be found. We have here the best historical, poetical, and moral works of a whole peo-

ple. These documents cover in time more than a millennium and a half. It is more than probable that during that time amusing incidents occurred, even in connection with the religious trend of the history, some of which would be reported; that grotesque and odd characters existed, some of whom would be described, and their sayings and doings noted; that among the moral teachers of the people, there were some at least, who would point their precepts with wit and edge their rebukes with sarcasm. We should expect to find all these things, as we should expect to find pathos or sublimity. The humorous is just as legitimate in literature and quite as much an element of influence. It glows in all the other great books which have shaped the life and thought of mankind; and it is only fair to presume that we shall find its light shining from those pages that have been most potent of all.

But is not "the volume of this book" a serious one? Is it not profoundly in earnest? Are not its themes most solemn? Is not its purpose the highest under heaven,

the most important to the inhabitants of earth? The conclusion, however, that the questioner has in mind is by no means inevitable. It is a mistake to suppose that humor is incompatible with seriousness, earnestness and solemnity. "As in one of my lectures," says Henry Reed, "I spoke of attempting to draw too precise a line around sacred literature, making it too much a thing apart, so in regard to the literature of wit and humor. I shall be very sorry, if such a title as that which I have been obliged to use, led any one to think of it as of a more distinctive existence than is the case, instead of regarding those faculties as pervading the literature in various degrees, and thus forming some of the elements of its life. I shall have occasion to trace these elements in close connection with elements of tragedy, and to show how the processes we generalize under the names of wit and humor are kindred with the most intense passion and the deepest feeling."

In human nature, the sources of laughter and tears lie close together, and the high-

est literature must express that nature in its entirety. "It is an understood fact," says Whipple, "that mirth is as innate in the mind as any other original faculty. The absence of it in individuals or communities is a defect." "He who laughs," says the mother of Goethe, "can commit no deadly sin." If it be true as Whipple says, that the absence of mirth in individuals or communities is a defect, then is the absence of it in literature likewise a defect. It is a defect because the literature which omits it fails to set forth all that there is in man. It leaves an important territory unexplored.

On the other hand, the literature which is designed to move and mold men must be addressed to human nature in its completeness. Freighted with destiny, charged with eternity as are the messages of the Bible, they are yet intended to impress men; they are addressed to human faculties in human speech. Whatever the capacities of language for touching the heart and operating upon the will, they may all be employed, though the theme soar to heaven or take hold on hell. The Bible is not an instru-

ment of a single string; it gives forth a thousand harmonies. It is attuned to every note in human nature.

III.

Thus far we have simply dealt with the presumption. The considerations advanced show us what we might expect to find. When we proceed from presumption to actual investigation, our conjectures are verified. There are certainly passages in the Bible which in any other writings we should call Wit and Humor. Since this is the case, our discussion is legitimate, however repugnant the very suggestion may be to the feelings with which we are accustomed to regard the Bible.

Let us take some examples. If we found in any other book such a saying as this, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor, so doth a little folly him that is in great reputation for wisdom and honor," should we not call it witty? Is it not witty as the Russian proverb "A spoonful of tar in a barrel of honey?"

Or consider such sentences as the following: "All the labor of a man is for his mouth, and yet his appetite is not filled." "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart." "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel." "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." "A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver him, yet must thou do it again." In other words, a man of violent temper is always getting into difficulties; you have no sooner helped him out of one than he madly plunges into another. Like the irascible person in the old nursery rhyme, who jumped into a bramble bush and scratched out both his eyes, he is no sooner extricated, than "with all his might and main, he jumps into another bush and puts them out again." "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Can he go upon hot coals and his feet not be burned?" "Wealth makes many friends,

but the poor is separated from his neighbor." "He that passeth by and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears." If we came upon such sentences in Johnson or Goldsmith, we should say in a moment that they were instances of genuine wit. Let us not hesitate to carry the same frankness of literary judgment to the Bible. When Isaiah characterizes certain ones as "mighty to drink wine and men of strength to mingle strong drink," does he not use essentially the same reproach that Prince Hal fastened upon Falstaff, "Wherein is he good but to taste sack and drink it?" Who shall say that the earlier satire did not suggest the later? Much has been written about Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Bible.

Here is a passage of biting sarcasm from Job. We should surely call it sarcasm if we found it in the pages of Robert South. Job is expressing his scorn for those who affect to look down upon him in his adversities: "But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to set with the dogs of

my flock." They are "the children of fools, yea, children of base men; they were viler than the earth." (We have an equivalent expression in "meaner than dirt.") They are members of the long-eared fraternity. He does not say so in the bluntest form of expression that can be used, and that any one less skillful would have used. Job puts it much more effectively: "Among the bushes they *brayed;* under the *nettles* they were gathered together." "If that is not wit," says one, "there is no such thing as wit. And yet the commentators do not see it, or will not see it. They are perfectly wooden when they come to any such gleam of humor."

There is a bit of ridicule in Jeremiah that we should be quick to call ridicule, if we came upon it elsewhere. He is describing the disasters that fell upon the allies of the King of Egypt. "Why are the strong ones swept away? They stood not because the Lord did thrust them down. He made them to stumble, yea they fell one upon another; and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of

our nativity, from the oppressing sword." They are defeated in spite of all the promises of the King of Egypt. He does not seem to avail them. His boasts are ineffectual. His disgusted allies depart, flinging at him the withering reproach, "*Pharoah, King of Egypt, is but a noise;* he hath let the appointed time pass by." That is to say, according to one paraphrase, "Pharoah is of no account now, he has had his chance and lost it; he has outlived his influence; his day is over; he is not a sovereign any longer; he is only a noise." Or as Matthew Henry puts it, "Pharoah can hector and talk big; but that is all; all his promises vanish into smoke." In the same spirit, Queen Catherine says of the dead Wolsey,

> "His promise was as he then was, mighty;
> But his performance, as he now is, nothing."

If we found a little sketch like the following in Thackeray, we should, beyond doubt, pronounce it humorous: "All the brethren of the poor do hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him.

He pursueth them with words, yet are they wanting to him." The words of a poor man can not travel fast enough to overtake his rich friends and neighbors. Indeed, Thackeray has drawn such a picture in his more elaborate description of Harry Warrington in the sponging-house, making vain appeals for help to his rich relatives and friends. "He pursued them with words, yet were they wanting to him." His aunt,—"a member of the great and always established Church of the Pharisees, sent him her blessing,—and a tract!"

If we found, in any modern literature, a sketch of the ruling deacon in a church, like John's description of Diotrephus, we should say it was tinged with satire. "I wrote unto the Church, but Diotrephus, *who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them*, receiveth us not. Wherefore if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words; and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, *and casteth them out of the Church.*" Evidently there was a deacon

in one of the apostolic churches, who always had to be consulted. Everything must go as he dictated. He did not even stand in awe of an accredited apostle. The minister must preach according to his views of theology, or signify his willingness to accept a call to a new field. Those members of the church who upheld a minister whom Diotrephus did not like, found their connection with the body severed without the formality of asking their consent. In the matter of having a Diotrephus within their borders, some churches to-day find themselves in the direct line of apostolic succession.

In the book of Acts, there is an account of Paul's reception at Athens. "And they took him and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine is, whereof thou speakest? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears; we would know, therefore, what these things mean." In the comment which follows this account, the writer indulges in a touch of ridicule upon the Athenian gossips and curiosity mongers. We should say it was a touch of ridicule if we found it in

Addison. "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, *spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.*" Indeed there is a sketch in Addison of which this might easily have been the ground-work. "There is no humor of my countrymen which I am more inclined to wonder at than *their general thirst after news.* A victory or defeat is equally agreeable to them. The shutting of a cardinal's mouth pleaseth them one post, and the opening of it another. They are delighted to hear the French Court is removed to Marli, and are afterwards as much delighted with its return to Versailles. They read the advertisements with the same curiosity as the articles of public news; and are as pleased to hear of a pye-bald horse that is strayed out of a field near Islington, as of a whole troop that has been engaged in any foreign adventure. In short, *they have a relish for anything that is news,* let the matter of it be what it will. *They are men of a voracious appetite.*" Is not the comment of the Scriptural writer upon the Athenians

in the same vein with Addison's comment upon the English?

Isaiah rebukes those "who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter,"—thus confusing moral distinctions. This is the same sort of sophistry that Addison exposes, in his gentle way, by proposing the following form of agreement: "We whose names are hereunto subscribed, do solemnly declare that we do in our consciences believe that two and two make four; and that we shall adjudge any man whatever to be our enemy who endeavors to persuade us to the contrary. We are likewise ready to maintain, with the hazard of all that is near and dear to us, that six is less than seven in all times and at all places; and that ten will not be more three years hence than it is at present. We do also firmly declare that it is our resolution as long as we live to call Black black and White white. *And we shall upon all occasions oppose such persons that upon any day of the year shall call Black white or White*

black, with the utmost of our lives and fortunes." The rebuke, in both cases, is the same.

IV.

What do these illustrations show? "That the Bible is, on the whole, a humorous book? Far from it. That religion is a humorous subject? that we are to throw all the wit we can into the treatment of it? No. But they show that the sense of the ludicrous is put into man by his Maker; that it has its uses; that we are not to be ashamed of it;" that we are not to be horrified at the mention of it in connection with things we deem most sacred. They show that the literature of the Bible contains the same elements that in any other literature we call Wit and Humor. They show us, also, that wit and humor do not of necessity produce hearty laughter or boisterous mirth; not always do they manifest themselves in "gibes and gambols and flashes of merriment that set the table in a roar." Those, therefore, who may expect something in these chapters that will shake one's sides with jollity, or

make him "laugh till his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up," will doubtless be disappointed. Wit and humor often lie too deep for laughter, as pathos often lies too deep for tears.

No attempt is here made at exact definition of the two words that are prominent in the general title of this book. Perhaps after they have passed through their final analysis we shall not be any wiser than before we cast them into the alembic. Barrow says of Humor: "It is a thing so versatile and multiform that it seems no less hard to settle a clear and certain notion thereof, than to make a portrait of Proteus or to define the figure of the fleeting air." We usually include under the general term all forms of pleasantry, grotesqueness, drollery, sarcasm, irony, ridicule. Our common acceptation shall serve us in these studies.

"There are many things," says Prof. Matthews, "that definition helps us to understand, but there are other things that we understand better than we can any possible definition of them; among these are the cold, sparkling, mercurial thing we call wit,

and that genial, juicy, unconscious thing we call humor."

With these preliminary observations, we proceed to examine the subject in detail:

"Are there not two points in the adventure of the diver?
One when a beggar he prepares to plunge;
The other when a prince he rises with his pearl?
Festus, I plunge."

* * * * * * * *

II. CHARACTER SKETCHES.

" ———Now, by two-headed Janus,
Nature hath framed strange fellows in her time;
Some that will evermore peep through their eyes,
And laugh like parrots at a bag-piper;
And other of such vinegar aspect,
That they'll not show their teeth by way of smile,
Tho' Nestor swore the jest were laughable."—

Merchant of Venice.

CHARACTER SKETCHES.

"With what prudence does the Son of Sirach caution us in the choice of our friends. And with what strokes of Nature, (I could almost say of Humour,) has he described the behavior of a treacherous and self-interested friend!"—*Addison.*

"THE history of the ancient Hebrews," says George Eliot, "gives the idea of a people who went about their business and their pleasures as gravely as a society of beavers; the smile and laugh are often mentioned metaphorically; but the smile is one of complacency, the laugh of scorn."

Against the authority of so illustrious a name, the writer of these pages confesses a somewhat different impression. It is difficult to believe that such sentiments as the following could have arisen among a people whose only smile was that of complacency, whose only laughter that of scorn:

"He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast."

"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance."

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

"Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart."

"The voice of mirth," "the voice of gladness" are phrases of frequent occurrence. The ancient Hebrews believed that there was a "time to laugh" as well as a "time to weep." Grave and serious as they were, there must have been in them, after all, something sunny and pleasant. They did not find the heavens forever black and the earth forever cheerless.

When we turn to the historical and biographical portions of Scripture, we find here and there a bit of quaintness and drollery in pictures of life and delineations of character that must have brought to the faces of those who read them or heard them smiles other than those of complacency; that must have been enjoyed with laughter other than that of scorn.

Mr. Shorthouse says, "Nature and humor do not lie far apart; the source and spring

of humor is human life." "The essence of humor," Carlyle remarks, "is sensibility; warm, tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence." "The man of humor," writes another distinguished critic, "seeing at one glance the majestic and the mean, the serious and the laughable; indeed, interpreting what is little or ridiculous by light derived from its opposite idea, delineates character as he finds it in life, without any impertinent intrusion of his own indignation or approval."

The writers of the Bible sketched manners and traits as they found them. Their pencils were faithful to nature. They reported what they saw. The features which provoke the smile, as well as those which move us to admire, condemn or weep, are pictured on their canvas. They had an eye for the ludicrous side of life, as well as for its more sober aspects. So genial is much of their — often unconscious — humor, so far removed from bitterness or scorn, that it should seem as if Addison and Irving might have drawn some of their inspiration from these old Hebrews.

In this chapter we shall give some illustrations from their sketches of character.

I.—Abimelech.

In the time of the Judges the unprincipled Abimelech contrived to have himself proclaimed king in Shechem. Knowing his unfitness for the throne, and vexed at his successful machinations, Jotham, a man of ready wit, ridicules the pretensions of the monarch and the folly of the people, in an admirable fable. Addison says: "Fables were the first pieces of wit that made their appearance in the world, and have been still highly valued, not only in times of the greatest simplicity, but among the most polite ages of mankind. Jotham's fable of the Trees is the oldest that is extant, and as beautiful as any that have been made since that time."

Perching himself upon the top of a hill, that his parable may not be brought to an untimely end, he speaks to the multitude: "The Trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them. And they said to the

Olive Tree, Reign thou over us. But the Olive Tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honor God and men, and go to be promoted over the Trees? Then said the Trees unto the Fig Tree, Come thou and reign over us. But the Fig Tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the Trees? Then said the Trees unto the Vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the Vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine which cheereth God and Man, and go to be promoted over the Trees?" Thus far the Trees have been unsuccessful. They have found among their fellows of the forest no available candidate whose character and record are good. They anticipated a difficulty of more modern times. But they are becoming desperate. They are determined to have a king. In this extremity what step do they take? "Then said all the Trees unto the *Bramble*, Come thou and reign over us." The Bramble cannot plead business. It cannot say, as do the Olive and Fig and Vine, "I am of some better

use." There is no reason, so far as any beneficent occupation is concerned, why it should not be king. The offer is eagerly accepted, and the pompous bush delivers itself of this high and mighty coronation address: "If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow; and if not, let fire come out of the Bramble and destroy the cedars of Lebanon!"

This Bramble, Jotham explains, represents Abimelech, while the misguided trees are the men of Shechem. Having made this application, Jotham became convinced that his mission was ended, and abandoned Mount Gerezim for a place of greater security. "And Jotham ran away and fled, and went to Beer and dwelt there for fear of Abimelech his brother." He did not wait to see what impression he had made. He was willing to let his story, moral and all, take care of itself; for in that day, as in every subsequent age, there was no room for a satirist in the kingdom of an incompetent ruler.

II. — Samson.

Farther on in the book of Judges, we have the portrait of Samson. How quaintly is the character drawn! A great lubberly, good-natured giant, but now and then bursting out into fits of unreasoning and uncontrolled anger, — not unlike Ajax in the play. He is constantly making himself ridiculous in his love affairs.

In *Love's Labor Lost*, the following dialogue occurs:—

"Armado. — Comfort me, boy. What great men have been in love?

"Moth. — Hercules, Master.

"Arm. — Most sweet Hercules! More authority dear boy, name more; and sweet my child, let them be men of good repute and carriage.

"Moth. — Samson, Master; he was a man of good carriage, for he raised the town gates on his back like a porter; and he was in love."

He tries to joke in clumsy riddles: "Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweetness." But his jokes were usually of a more practical and even more disastrous kind. L'Estrange, in

his *History of Humor*, says: "The first character in the records of antiquity that seems to have had anything quaint or droll about it is that of Samson. Standing out amid the confusion of legendary times, he gives us good specimens of the fierce, wild kind of merriment relished in ancient days; and was very fond of making very sanguinary sport for the Philistines. He was an exaggeration of a not very uncommon type of man in which brute strength is joined to loose morals and whimsical fancy. People were more inclined to laugh at sufferings formerly than now, because they were not keenly sensitive to pain, and also had less feeling and consideration for others. That Samson found some malicious kind of pleasure and diversion in his reprisals on his enemies and made his misfortunes minister to his amusement, is evident from the strange character of his exploits. 'He caught three hundred foxes, and took firebrands, and turned tail to tail, and put a firebrand in the midst between two tails, and when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn of the Philis-

tines, and burned up both the shocks and also the standing corn of the Philistines, with the vineyards and olives.' On another occasion, he allowed himself to be bound with cords and thus apparently delivered powerless into the hands of his enemies; he then broke his bonds 'like flax that was burnt with fire,' and taking the jawbone of an ass which he found, slew a thousand men with it. His account of this massacre shows that he regarded it in a humorous light: 'With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of an ass, I have slain a thousand men.' We might also refer to his carrying away the gates of Gaza to the top of a hill that is before Hebron, and to his duping Delilah about the seven green withes. * * * Samson was evidently regarded as a droll fellow in his day."

What a touch of human nature there is in the scene between Samson and his wife, when she asks for the solution of that wretched riddle! "Thou dost but hate me," is her reproach, "and lovest me not; thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it to me."

What! is there a domestic storm already brewing? There is something of a thunder-clap in the angry retort of the husband: "Behold, I have not told it to my father and my mother," (as if that would make any difference to her!) "and shall I tell it to thee?" Comparisons of this sort are but little noted for their conciliatory tendencies, and so we are fully prepared for what follows: "*And she wept before him* the seven days while the feast lasted." Poor Samson is not proof against woman's tears. He could rend the lion as a kid, and carry off the gates of Gaza as easily as a shepherd could bear a lamb upon his shoulders, but his superhuman strength is of no avail against "women's weapons, water-drops." We are not surprised to find that "it came to pass on the seventh day *he told her*." Thus did conjugal quarrels end in the time of the Judges.

But if Samson was worsted in the encounter with his wife, he scored a victory against the Philistines who had frightened her into telling them the answer to the riddle. When they came with an air of

insolent triumph and said: "What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?" he rather impolitely retorted, — traces of gall and wormwood at his recent humiliation by his wife still rankling in his mind, — "If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." But he paid the debt of honor he owed them, the wager he had lost. "He went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil and gave changes of raiment unto them which expounded the riddle." Thersites would have said of him as he did of Achilles, "His wit was his sinew." Samson had wonderful muscular power of repartee.

On another occasion Samson amused himself by telling monstrous lies about the secret of his strength: "If they bind me with seven green withes that were never dried, then shall I be weak and be as another man;" "if they bind me fast with new ropes;" "if thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web;" and so on. As Prince Hal said of the stories of his boon companion, "These lies are like the father

that begets them; gross as a mountain, open, palpable." Delilah, wearied with these practical jokes, exclaims at last, "How canst thou say 'I love thee,' when thine heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these three times, and hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth." Then she began a course of teasing and entreaty that finally proved successful. "It came to pass when she pressed him daily with her words, *so that his soul was vexed unto death*, that he told her all his heart." Samson was great physically, but so weak mentally and morally that he is continually reducing himself to an absurd spectacle. He could not resist Delilah's persistent importunities, nor had he sufficient resolution to betake himself from the presence of temptation. He had, no doubt, laughed loud and long at the victims of his huge falsehoods, but he is finally harassed by a woman whose reproaches and entreaties are like "a continual dropping on a rainy day," into telling the fatal truth. Upon the whole, as we look upon the portrait of Samson, we find it impossible to respect him.

We can only smile at his folly. The one flash of genuine nobility comes at the last. "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it." After all, that heroic death more than half redeems the vacillating career it closes.

III. — Nabal.

There is quite a different character in the first book of Samuel. His name is Nabal. The word itself means "fool;" and the man's wife, Abigail, volunteered the opinion that it was a very accurate description of her husband: "*As his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name and folly is with him.*" He is self-satisfied, hard-headed, irritable, obstinate. We are told that he was "churlish and evil in his doings." He is blunt in speech, rude, and even boorish in manners. He stands out of the story like an old, gnarled tree. It would not be a matter of marvel if he suggested to Fielding the character of Squire Western. They have many points in common. The servants of Nabal are afraid of him: "He is such a son of Belial that a man

cannot speak to him!" He is fond of wine, and sometimes falls asleep over his cups. When David asks a favor of him, he exclaims: "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away, every man from his own master!" As much as to say, "The country is full of runaways and tramps, and how do I know but this David is one of them?" Then he goes on —"Shall I take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" Let this David look out for himself; it is all that I can do to provide for my own family and servants! How exactly in the Squire Western vein: "It's well for un I could not get at un; I'd spoiled his caterwauling; I'd a taught un to meddle with meat for his master. He shan't ever have a morsel of meat of mine, or a varden to buy it with!" Just the man, after he has stormed his life away, to die of apoplexy! And Nabal *did* die suddenly, a few days after he had been "very drunken."

IV.—Jonah.

There are some elements of genuine humor in the story of Jonah. Whatever may be thought of the miraculous portions of the narrative, the character of the shirking and whimpering prophet is faithfully drawn. He first tries to escape the command of the Lord by fleeing to Tarshish, but finds that he who runs away from duty runs into danger. Thoroughly alarmed by the disastrous outcome of his attempt to get away from responsibility, he finally goes to Nineveh, but is not reconciled to his task. He did not go because he was anxious to serve the Ninevites, but because he wished to avert further danger from himself. He is in just the mood to complain of everything, to snatch at any straw of justification for his former conduct. Contrary to his expectations, and even, it must be confessed, to his secret wishes, the Ninevites were moved to repentance by his half-hearted preaching, with its undertone of grumbling, and God forgave them and turned away the threatened destruction of

their city. But when the forty days expire, and the city does not fall, Jonah is angry, and he insists that he does well to be angry. He has been obliged to trudge through the streets of the city day after day shouting his predictions of doom, and now he is denied the poor satisfaction of seeing the bolts fall from heaven in vengeance. He has even gone so far as to prepare for himself a booth in a safe place, under whose shadow he might sit and enjoy the spectacle,—"where he might see what would become of the city." And now there is nothing to come of it all! "It displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry." Surely the Lord is not considerate of the feelings of his prophet. Jonah's pent-up displeasure breaks forth: "I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying while I was yet in mine own country?" Did I not tell you so? Did I not say then and there how this whole affair would turn out? "Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." Why should I blister under the sun of Nineveh, when I might take mine ease in Tarshish? "For I knew that Thou art a

gracious God, slow to anger and of great kindness and repentest thee of the evil,"— too good-natured to do this thing! And now that I have come, my prophecy has failed and my mission is a farce. These wretches are spared and the prophet of God is a laughing-stock! "I do well to be angry, even unto death!" He goes farther: "I beseech thee, take away my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." It is better to die than to be made ridiculous. Nothing could reconcile Jonah, just then, to the thought of further existence. Like Mr. Mantilini, he was determined to become a "body."

V. — Absalom.

We must not pass by that exquisite likeness of the demagogue in Second Samuel. "Absalom rose up early and stood beside the way of the gate; and it was so that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him and said, Of what city art thou? and he said, Thy servant is one of

the tribes of Israel. And Absalsom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no one deputed of the king to hear thee." Things are getting very loose in the government; the country is going to the dogs. The present administration has been so long in power, that it has grown careless of the interests of the people. Absalom said, moreover, "O that I were made Judge in the land; that any man which hath any suit or any cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" We need a change. Put our party in power and see whether the rights of the people will not be better regarded; see whether there will not be reform in all departments of the government, and better times in the nation. "And it was so that when any man came to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand and took him and kissed him." Really, here we have the origin of the hand shaking candidate of to-day. Here are the beginnings of that cajolery of the "poor laboring man," "the honest farmer," "the oppressed people," which the modern aspirant to office so earnestly affects. "And in this manner

did Absalom to all Israel that came unto the King for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." In one point the comparison between Absalom and his later imitators fails. Absalom, it will be remembered, closed his career by getting hung upon a tree. It is greatly to be regretted that many of our modern demagogues do not complete the parallel.

VI. — Shimei.

If Absalom is a type of the demagogue, Shimei surely is a type of the sycophant. While David was in power, Shimei was devoted. When David was supplanted by the scheming Absalom and went forth heart-broken and weary from the city where he had reigned, Shimei basely deserts him to become the tool of Absalom, and heaps insults upon the head of the fallen monarch. Here is a specimen of his conduct and language: "He cast stones at David and at the servants of King David. * * * And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody

man and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son; and behold thou art taken in thy mischief because thou art a bloody man." This exhibition of meanness rouses the just wrath of Abishai, who wishes to put an effectual stop to the miserable proceeding: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the King? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." But David forbids, and Shimei secure in the continued possession of his head followed after David and his men and "cursed as he went, and threw stones at him and cast dust." But the scene changes. Absalom lies dead under a heap of stones in the forest. David is returning to Jerusalem as king. A boat has carried him across the Jordan. Who is this that meets him as he lands and fawns upon him? The wretch who stoned and cursed him the other day. It is Shimei who forsook him and pelted him when he was unfortunate, but who returns to offer, "in a

bondman's key," his humble services when David is restored to power. "Let not my Lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did, the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart." Do not grieve over it, do not take it too sorely. I admit that it was rather hasty and ill-advised. "For thy servant doth know that I have sinned." To be sure I threw some stones, and kicked up a little dust, and swore a few oaths, — very inconsiderate it seems now; but I am willing to forget the whole affair. And see what splendid atonement I offer! "*Behold, I am come first this day of all the house of Joseph, to go down to meet my Lord, the King.*" Think of that! Ah, it is "my lord, the king" to-day; no longer a "man of Belial." My lord the king can grant favors. Any little trifle of an office for which he may want an incumbent would be considered. Remember, "*I am come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king.*

Sterne says: "The wheel turns round

once more; Absalom is cast down, and David returns in peace. Shimei suits his behavior to the occasion, and is the first man also who hastens to greet him; and had the wheel turned round a hundred times, Shimei, I dare say, in every period of its rotation would have been uppermost." Then he adds: "O Shimei, would to heaven when thou wast slain, that all thy family had been slain with thee and not one of thy resemblance left. But ye have multiplied exceedingly and replenished the earth; and if I prophesy rightly, ye will in the end subdue it. Go where you will, in every quarter, in every profession, you see a Shimei following the wheels of the fortunate through thick mire and clay."

It is not claimed that the writers of the Bible drew these portraits for the purpose of making ludicrous those whom they painted, but the features were in the originals, and they who wrote were simply faithful to nature. They portrayed what they saw. They did not blind themselves to facts; and now worthless usurper, weak-willed giant, churlish country squire of Palestine, grumbling

prophet, scheming demagogue and oily sycophant live forever on their canvas. "Now, by two-headed Janus, Nature *hath* framed strange fellows in her time;" and some of those "strange fellows" lived in Judea thousands of years ago.

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III. "TOUCHES OF NATURE."

"The ludicrous has its place in the Universe; it is not a human invention, but one of the Divine ideas, illustrated in the practical jokes of kittens and monkeys, long before Aristophanes or Shakespeare." — *Holmes.*

"TOUCHES OF NATURE."

"To explain the nature of laughter and tears is to account for the condition of human life; for it is in a manner compounded of these two. It is tragedy or comedy, sad or merry, as it happens."—*Hazlitt.*

"ONE touch of nature," says Shakespeare, "makes the whole world kin;" but the great dramatist did not define exactly what he meant by "touch of nature," and the critics of many generations have been at war over the question. Perhaps he could not have told us, even if he had tried, — any more than the critics can tell us. When Democritus was asked his definition of a man, his only reply was, "A man is that which we all see and know." Further than this the philosopher could not proceed. But while Shakespeare has not given us a definition, he has given us an illustration:

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin, —
That all, with one consent, praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past;
And give to dust that is a little gilt
More laud than gilt o'erdusted."

The whole world is kin in this, that all with one consent inexcusably forget the substantial past and praise the present folly, if that folly be well tricked out. Humanity proves its oneness by its foibles as well as by its virtues. "Foolery, sir, doth walk about the orb; like the sun it shineth everywhere." Things deserving of laughter and things intended to provoke it have always been happening; and the faculties by which men perceive the foolish and ludicrous have always existed in human nature.

> "Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
> Nods and becks and wreathed smiles,
> Sport that wrinkled care derides,
> And laughter holding both his sides," —

all these were in the past as well as in the present. They are "touches of nature" that "make the whole world kin."

The statement was made in the preceding chapter that the writers of the Bible, especially of the historical books, drew faithfully from real life, and sketched manners and traits as they found them. They neither smoothed over nor concealed anything.

They were absolutely frank. This fidelity to nature made it inevitable that the writers should now and then depict the ludicrous side of life and character, describe grotesque situations and paint amusing scenes. These are not uproariously funny, they will not provoke boisterous merriment, any more than will a page of Addison; but they are none the less specimens of genuine humor. Indeed, Carlyle reminds us that "true humor springs not more from the head than from the heart; it issues not in laughter, but in smiles that lie far deeper."

We may be sure that all life from the very beginning has had its humorous no less than its serious side. If any record had been kept, we should no doubt find that Adam and Eve had their jokes about the apples — it is universally assumed that they *were* apples — on that forbidden tree, and that they were quite as good as any jokes that have been made about those same apples in more recent years. The masons and bricklayers on the tower of Babel no doubt poked their thumbs into each other's ribs and slapped each other on the back to emphasize

their rude jokes about the late "wet spell," and wondered how long it would take to get to Heaven with their building. And we imagine that even during the flood itself there were sanguine souls who took the whole matter philosophically, declaring that 'it never rained long when the clouds looked *that* way and the wind was in *that* direction.' The Israelites, we suspect, lightened their bondage in Egypt by mimicking the pompous manners of their hated taskmasters and ridiculing the fools who thought that bricks could be made without straw. And the grimmest Egyptian mummy that now graces a museum or helps to fertilize the wheat-fields of the West once wore a smile or grin upon his leathern face as he related to a brother mummy how Pharoah made sport of the Israelites by promising to "let them go," and then when they were all on tip-toe with expectation, countermanding the order. Then they would both shake their heads and chuckle with delight over the pleasant humor of their monarch and declare that 'Pharoah was in high spirits to-day.' Thus the world has rolled and chirruped and

cackled on since the time when man emerged from the animal. And Holmes suggests, in our motto, that the sense of humor was in the animal before man.

I.

Sometimes the humor of the Bible lies in the thing described,—the odd or awkward or absurd thing said or done.

"The Iliad," says Sidney Smith, "would never have come down to these times, if Agamemnon had given Achilles a box on the ear. We should have trembled for the Æneid, if some Trojan nobleman had kicked the pious Æneas in the fourth book. Æneas, may have deserved it, but he never could have founded the Roman Empire after so distressing an accident." And yet accidents quite as distressing, if not of precisely the same nature, have happened in the best families that ever lived upon this planet. The writers of the Bible have not hesitated to give us a very frank account of some of them.

Imagine the vacant look of the terrified Aaron, as he gave his imbecile explan-

ation of the golden calf! Moses and Joshua are coming down from the mountain. "And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And Moses answered, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome; but the noise of them that sing do I hear." Soon they draw near the camp and see "the calf and the dancing." Then does the anger of Moses wax hot. In his rage he flings down and shatters the "tables of stone." Like a whirlwind he descends upon the camp, hurls the miserable calf into the fire, and demands an explanation of his recreant brother. "What did this people unto thee that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Aaron quails beneath the wrath of Moses and stammers: "Thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods which shall go before us: for as for this Moses" — think of that, *this Moses* — "that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of

him." You see they are set on mischief; they were disrespectful even unto you—*this Moses.* Something had to be done. "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and"—what do you suppose happened?—"*there came out this calf!*" I was as much surprised as you are, but no one is responsible—*it did itself!*

In quaint fashion did Saul make honest confession when smitten with remorse on account of his persecution of David: "Behold I have played the fool!" The regret of Prince Hal also—"Thus do we play the fools with time, while the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us."

What an odd—almost laughable—spectacle is the bombastic Nebuchadnezzar, one moment proudly striding along the battlements of his palace, "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded?"—the next eating grass like the beasts of the field! As Carlyle says: "A purple Nebuchadnezzar rejoices to feel himself now veritably emperor of this great Babylon which he has builded;

and *is* a nondescript, biped-quadruped, on the eve of a seven years' course of grazing."

There is a scene in the life of David in which that worthy is represented as cutting fantastic capers before high heaven. At one time, in order to keep out of Saul's way, David went down to Gath. The servants of King Achish recognize him, and tell their royal master that this is the famous David over whose exploits the daughters of Israel sang. "Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" But David does not wish his identity known and with characteristic shrewdness he feigns insanity. "He feigned himself mad, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate and let his spittle fall down upon his beard," — a sorry looking hero! So thinks the king Achish. What, this the man that slew the giant? this drivelling lunatic the victor that Israel's daughters praised? His disgust knows no bounds. He is almost as grotesque in his anger as is David in his appearance and conduct. He turns upon his

courtiers in offended dignity and cries, "Lo, ye see the man is mad; wherefore have ye brought him to me? *Have I need of madmen*, (are not ye my own servants sufficient?) that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" "Fool me no fools," says King Achish. When King Achish asked, "Have I need of madmen?" he evidently thought of his own servants and courtiers as did Christian I., of Denmark, in modern times, of those who graced *his* Court. He sharply remarked, on a presentation to him of several court fools, that "he was not in want of such things, and if he were, he had only to give license to his courtiers, who, to his certain knowledge, were capable of exhibiting themselves as the greatest fools in Europe!"

In Nehemiah's account of building the walls of Jerusalem, he shows how sorely the Jews took the clumsy jibes of their foes and gives us a specimen of Samaritan joking in that early day. Sanballat mocked the Jews and said, "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will

they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish which are burned?" Tobiah, the Amorite, was yet more caustic: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he will even break down their stone wall." This ridicule, although the jests do not seem very formidable to us, was harder to bear than attacks with sword and spear. It is so to-day. We can stand anything but laughter. One would rather be made to appear infamous than ridiculous. The only answer the builders could make was to pray for the destruction of their sarcastic persecutors. They wished that heaven's bolts of lightning might answer these bolts of wit.

II.

Sometimes the humor lies in the description itself rather than in the thing described. Dr. Barrow, in his famous essay, says of facetiousness, "Sometimes it is wrapped up in a dress of humorous expression."

An excellent example is furnished in the account of the mob at Ephesus: "Some,

therefore, cried one thing and some another; for the assembly was confused; *and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.*"

When Sidney Smith speaks of "distressing accidents," we are reminded that an exceedingly "distressing accident" happened in the very first family of which we have any record—the family that started in Eden. Aside from any question as to the literal truth of the story, nothing can exceed the simplicity and naturalness with which the writer has described the culprits and their excuses. The first thing they did after their transgression was to hide. The supreme and perpetual folly of guilt is to imagine that it can be hid when the voice of the Lord God is heard in the garden. "And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" The culprit creeps forth from his hiding-place and stammers, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I com-

manded thee that thou shouldst not eat?" Now the guilty secret is out and Adam pleads in extenuation, "The woman that thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." It was no fault of mine. That *woman* was to blame —the woman, O Lord, remember, that *thou* gavest to be with me. Is not a little of the responsibility thine also, O Lord? A touch of nature! "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be!" But Eve will not bear all the blame. She also is ready with her excuse: "The serpent beguiled me and I did eat." Another remove in the location of the responsibility. If we can forget all that theology has put into this story and look on it simply as a bit of literature, it is a charming description of the way in which we mortals disclaim accountability for our deeds.

> "And oftentimes excusing of a fault,
> Doth make the fault worse by the excuse;
> As patches set upon a little breach,
> Discredit more in hiding of the fault,
> Then did the fault before it was so patched."

Job has expressed his contempt for Adam's conduct in Eden by invoking upon himself

even greater ills than he was then suffering, if he followed that disgraceful example,—"If I covered my transgression as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom." In magnificent scorn of Adam's hiding from the Lord and laying his guilt upon another, Job exclaims, "Behold, my desire is that the Almighty *would* answer me!" and avows that "he would declare unto him the number of his steps, and as a prince would go near unto him,"—not skulk away from his presence among trees and bushes. The low estimation in which Job holds Adam suggests that the old Hebrew who wrote the story in Genesis, may have intended to hold up that primal man in a humorous light.

Whether the story of Balaam is literally correct in its details is one of the questions this little volume is not intended to discuss. The writer of that story tells his tale as naïvely as if conversations between men and animals were of everyday occurrence. If we read it as we would any similiar piece, any other fable in which men and beasts speak to each other, we should say that there were some elements of the ludicrous

in the picture of the prophet rebuked by his ass. "And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way and went into the field. And Balaam smote the ass to turn her into the way." Just what any one would do to a "shying" animal, upon impulse. "But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and he smote her again." Naturally enough! "And the angel of the Lord went further and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff." The rising wrath of the prophet can no longer be controlled. The turning from the way, the crushing of his foot against the wall, and finally the falling down under him and refusing to proceed further,

—these indignities on the part of the ass at length exasperate the prophet beyond all measure, and he right lustily lays on the cudgel. "What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times?" meekly inquires the belabored ass. "Because thou hast mocked me, I would that there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill thee," roars Balaam. Thou hast mocked me; thou hast played tricks upon thy master, the prophet of God. Thou hast done this on purpose to vex me and put me to shame. Thou hast made a sorry spectacle of me with thy pranks, and thou hast crushed my foot in the bargain. "Am I not thine ass upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?" Should you not have known there was something unusual? These are touches of nature in a story which might illustrate the saying of Isaiah in which he attributes higher wisdom to brutes than to men: "The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people will not consider." Was it this saying that Shakes-

peare had in mind when he said, through the lips of Mark Antony:

> "O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
> And men have lost their reason."

At one time the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon and other cities, and put them into the cities of Samaria to take the places of the children of Israel; but the new inhabitants did not fear the Lord, so the writer tells us that the Lord sent lions among them and slew them. Some one spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, "The nations which thou hast moved and placed in the cities of Samaria know not the manner of the God of the land." They are not acquainted with his habits and methods, and have gotten themselves into great trouble. The God of the land has sent lions among them. The king, hearing this, is in great dismay. It will never do—the ravages of those lions must be stopped. He evidently thought, as did Nick Bottom, "There is no more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living, and we ought to look to it." "Then the king of Assyria com-

manded, saying, Carry thither one of the priests whom ye brought from thence, and let him go there and dwell and teach them the manner of the God of the land." The priest went and taught the uninitiated people not to provoke a God who could let hungry lions loose upon them at any moment. The people listened in terror. The result of the instruction was that "the people *feared* the Lord,"—with a side glance at the lions. They tried to refrain from what would make him angry enough to order out the lions; but after all—and there must have been a twinkle in the eye of the scribe as he recorded it—"*they served their own gods.*"

When Queen Vashti refused to come into the presence of King Ahasuerus and his drunken lords, she did something that was wholly unprecedented. Nothing of the kind had ever before been heard of in the whole history of the empire. The revellers are shocked sober. Consternation reigns supreme. When did a queen ever refuse to do the bidding of a king? a wife the bidding of a husband? Are all our ancient

notions of propriety to be overturned? What will be the effect of Vashti's rebellion? The feelings of the king are outraged because the queen declines to unveil her beauty before his roistering courtiers. Enraged, he demands, "What shall be done unto Queen Vashti because she hath not performed the commandment of the King Ahasuerus?" It is a grave question. The lords themselves have a stake in this matter. They fear the result of this strong-minded example. The contagion of disobedience may spread. If it should, whose authority as husband is safe? And Memucan answered, "Vashti, the queen, hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in the province of the King Ahasuerus. For this deed of Queen Vashti's shall come abroad to all women, to make their husbands contemptible in their eyes, when it shall be reported that the King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, *but she came not.* And this day shall all the princesses of Persia and Media which have heard of the deed of the

queen, say the like unto all the king's princes. So shall there arise too much contempt and wrath." Such a thought could not be entertained. As Dogberry would put it, "It is most tolerable and not to be endured." Memucan, therefore, advises: "If it please the king let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she." The penalty is severe, but the case is one that demands heroic treatment. "And when the king's decree which he shall make, shall be published throughout all his empire, *all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both great and small.*" The advice is accepted. "The saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan; for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, to every people after their language, that *every man should bear rule in his own house.*" Thus

perished the first recorded movement in the direction of woman's rights!

III.

The humor of the Biblical writers is often shown in the way they pierce through outward actions and penetrate to the hidden motives of men. Before their keen vision external disguises are vain.

Let us turn to the account of sending the demons from the maniac into the swine. Let us take the account that speaks of but one maniac. "Then they that fed the swine fled and told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they came to Jesus and see him that was possessed of the devil and had the legion, sitting clothed and in his right mind; and they were afraid." It must have seemed absurd to the evangelist that these Gadarenes should have been afraid of the insane man after he had been restored. But the swineherds have not yet told all their story. "And when they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was

possessed with the devils and *also concerning the swine*—" "Aye, there's the rub!" "when they heard *that, they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*" A man has been restored, but a herd of swine has been lost. This new prophet will ruin us all, if he stays here. Let him begone. Though he saved men, they prayed him to depart because he let the swine be drowned. Jesus himself said once that "every man was of more value than many sparrows;" but these Gadarenes seemed to think that no man was worth "two thousand swine."

In the preceding section of this chapter, Paul's description of a mob is noted. It will be interesting to understand the occasion of that mob. When Paul preached at Ephesus, there was a marked decline in the demand for images and silver shrines of Diana. The market became weak. One of the principal manufacturers, Demetrius, called together all who were in the same business and said: "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover, ye see and hear that not alone in Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul

hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that there be no gods which are made with hands: so that not only *this our craft is in danger to be set at naught*, but that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth!" Demetrius, the unctuous hypocrite, seems to throw the real consideration into the background, and to be actuated mainly by concern for the honor of his goddess. Ah, Demetrius, Demetrius, little do you, little do your fellow craftsmen care for Diana and her worship, except as you get your gain through her devotees. But make the people think you are full of zeal for religion, and under the mantle of this falsehood cloak your motives, as you rush through the streets crying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Rouse the populace, always ripe for mischief, and always more furious than ever when they think that religion, something of which they do not understand the first letter, and of which they are absolutely destitute, is in danger. Rouse the people, make a pious demonstra-

tion, O Demetrius, but know that he who recorded it all for future ages, wrote down your inmost secret — "*By this craft we have our wealth!*"

Another instance of hypocrisy similar to that of Demetrius, occurred at Philippi. Paul and his comrades had spoiled the business of certain ones who had in charge a damsel who uttered prophecies and told fortunes, by casting out her "spirit of divination." "*And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone,* they caught Paul and Silas and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrate, saying, These men being Jews do exceeding trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to observe, being Romans." It is patriotism that furnishes the cloak in this case. No allusion to their loss of money — surely not; what matters that? "He who steals my purse steals trash." But we must do our duty by our fellow-citizens. We must not let these Jewish notions corrupt our civilization. We are loyal Romans, let all the world know! Is there not something

in this incident to suggest the truthfulness of Dr. Johnson's remark, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel?"

The result of the uproar was that the apostles were beaten and cast into prison. Somehow it was soon discovered that they themselves were Roman citizens, "and when it was day, the magistrates sent the sergeants, saying, Let these men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go; now, therefore, depart and go in peace." It is now Paul's turn to be indignant, and he is not the man to let the opportunity slip. Paul insisted, as he had a right to do, upon his dignity as a Roman citizen. He tartly replied, "They have taken us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and do they now thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but *let them come themselves and fetch us.*" A touch of nature there! "And they came (meekly enough now, those pompous magistrates) *and brought them out.*"

A man who never lacked courage was Paul. It had been told him that there were

certain ones among the Corinthians who had respect for his letters, but something bordering on contempt for his person. "For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." This is his answer: "Let such an one think this, that such as we are in word by letters, when we are absent, such will we be also in deed, when we are present." Let those scoffers look to themselves!

In lighter and almost playful vein, is his remark about the church at Corinth, in his second letter: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds." And yet there was one point in which the Corinthian church was inferior to others: "For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, *except it be that I myself was not burdensome unto you?*" Paul had allowed the other churches with which he labored to support him, but to the Corinthian church he had not accorded the same privilege. He had favored it with no opportunity for benevolence. "*Forgive me,*" he exclaims, "*this wrong.*"

Paul relates that on one occasion he had a dispute with Peter at Antioch, in which he "withstood Peter to the face, because Peter was to blame." It is to be doubted whether Peter ever quite forgot this dispute. The memory of it may have lingered and been particularly active when he referred in one of his own letters to "our beloved brother Paul who, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles speaking of these things; *in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unstable and unlearned do wrest,* as they do also the other Scriptures, (pray do not think that I am making brother Paul's writings an exception) *to their own destruction.*"

There is another phase of this general subject that is reserved for separate treatment in the following chapter. We pause here to say that the people of Bible times have been removed from the people of to-day by a chasm too wide and deep. We have been accustomed to look upon them as belonging to another race — almost to another world. It is difficult to believe that they

were "men of like passions with ourselves." It seems almost like sacrilege to intimate that they had their follies and weaknesses; that they did things absurd and laughable, and sometimes went farther and did things that were mean and wicked. There was a vast deal of human nature in those sublime characters. Gail Hamilton sums them up as follows: "Adam had dominion over the earth, but he attempted to shield himself from the divine displeasure by laying the blame upon his wife, which no gentleman would ever do. Noah was a 'just man and perfect in his generation,' if you do not mind an occasional fit of drunkenness. Abraham was a fine old sheik, a truly heroic figure, brave, generous, courteous, hospitable, magnanimous; no wonder the haughty Jews loved to remember and repeat that they were Abraham's children. But Abraham had his weaknesses and fell before his temptations; and Isaac followed in his footsteps. Of Jacob perhaps the least said the better, though he maintained his position as head of his family with unrelenting vigor, calling no man master, either son or

king. There may have been other men whose life was 'without fear and without reproach'; but their history is unknown to us; their portrait is hardly more than a name."

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IV. THE SENSE OF HUMOR IN JESUS.

"When a child, with child-like apprehensions that dived not beneath the surface of the matter, I read those parables — not guessing the involved wisdom — I had more yearnings toward that simple architect that built his house upon the sand, than I entertained for his more cautious neighbor; I grudged at the harsh censure pronounced upon the quiet soul that kept his talent; and prizing their simplicity beyond the more provident, and to my apprehension, somewhat *unfeminine* wariness of their competitors, I felt a kindness that amounted almost to a *tendre* for those thoughtless virgins. I have never made an acquaintance since that lasted, or a friendship that answered, with any that had not some tincture of the absurd in their characters." — *Charles Lamb.*

THE SENSE OF HUMOR IN JESUS.

"Amid the sorrow, disappointment, agony, and anguish of the world, — our dark thoughts and tempestuous passions, the gloomy exaggerations of self will, the enfeebling illusions of melancholy, — wit and humor, light and lightning, shed their soft radiance and dart their electric flash."— *Whipple.*

"How curious it is," says the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, "that we always consider solemnity, and the absence of all gay surprises and encounters of wits, as essential to the idea of the future life of those whom we thus deprive of half their faculties and then call *blessed!* There are not a few who, even in this life, seem to be preparing themselves for that smileless eternity by banishing all gayety from their hearts and all joyousness from their countenances." Rather than believe in the "smileless eternity" of such as these, we should accept the conjecture of Soame Jennings, that "a portion of the happiness of seraphim and just men made perfect would

be derived from an exquisite perception of the ludicrous."

To that school of melancholy teachers who frown upon all pleasantry, and buttress their gloomy position with the assertion that "Jesus wept but never smiled," the title of this chapter will be particularly offensive. It will strike them as downright blasphemy to intimate that Jesus possessed and used the sense of humor so common to mankind. We assuredly appreciate the delicacy of the position, and shall endeavor to avoid, in our treatment of this subject, anything that might wound the most sensitive soul.

There are several considerations that will pave the way. We take it for granted that Jesus was a complete human being, and that as such a being he must have had all the human attributes and faculties,— the faculty of mirthfulness among them. He was a man, and lacked nothing that pertains to men. Then, too, had he been without the sense of humor, much in the lives and characters of those with whom he had to deal, he never could have understood and

reached. The full success of his mission depended upon his knowing all that there is in man, and upon being able to gain access to him through every avenue of his nature.

Nor were the circumstances of his life unfavorable to the development of this particular attribute. Theology and Art have conspired to produce upon the world the impression that Jesus was an exceptionally wretched and suffering man. They have taken one or two expressions in Isaiah, such as, "his countenance was marred," "he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," expressions which they misunderstood and misapplied, and with them have laid the foundations of their house of woe. They have seized upon a few of the sadder incidents of his career, and have exaggerated them into undue prominence, — have given them undue proportions. Especially have they made much of his agony in the garden and his death upon the cross. These events have been magnified into such mountains that all the rest of his life seems to lie hidden beneath their

shadows. It appears never to have entered the mind of either preacher or painter that the physical anguish of his death must have been even less than that which many martyrs at the stake or martyrs upon sick-beds have borne; and that before death came, he had lived a life with many bright days and many happy experiences. His existence upon earth was not a protracted sorrow, a monumental grief. Many a rose had blossomed at his feet before the thorns were twisted into a crown for his brow.

What shall we say of the thirty peaceful years under his father's roof, with his brothers and sisters? Did he not in boyhood have the amusements of other children? Is there not a memento of his youthful sports in what he says of the games of the children in the market-place, when they were playing at weddings and funerals? Did he not, when a young man, delight in his home and in his companions? Can we imagine that he moved among those who were nearest and dearest to him, with a a face to which a smile was as much a

stranger as a tropic flower to the frozen zone?

When, as a mature man, he entered upon his public ministry, although he was exposed to frequent attacks from the representatives of the established religion, yet he was never without friends; never without a place of refuge from the heat of battle. There were many homes in which a welcome always awaited him, and whose hospitality he gladly accepted. Is it probable that he was accustomed to sit in these homes — to use Shakespeare's phrase — "like his grandsire cut in alabaster?"

More than once we are directly told that "he rejoiced in spirit;" more than once he spoke of his "joy" to his disciples. There is much evidence that Jesus was not a wretched but a happy man. Did this happiness never express itself in words or countenance?

There are other considerations that go far to refute the dismal assertion that "Jesus wept but never smiled." Tired mothers brought their children to him and he rebuked the supercilious disciples who inter-

fered. Can we think that on this occasion he had a woe-begone look? We read of him often at feasts; would he have been invited if he had been accustomed to sit at the the table like the skeleton at an Egyptian banquet? Did he not by his frequent attendance upon festive occasions incur the odium of being a wine-bibber and a glutton? He was also a favorite with the common people. They heard him gladly. But there must have been something attractive in his presence and manner, as well as in his words, and the words themselves must have appealed to the shrewd, homely, common sense of his hearers. If he had been the sad spirit he has been pictured, would the people have followed him and listened to him as they did?

When we leave the outward circumstances and the presumption they furnish, and examine the fragments of his speech that have been preserved for us, many of them certainly contain the element of humor. We should undoubtedly call it humor if it came from any other lips than those of Jesus; if we found it in any other book than the New Testament.

The purpose of this chapter will be grossly misapprehended, however, if any one shall suppose that we are trying to degrade Jesus to the level of a professional joker. Nothing is further from our intention. The very thought is repulsive. One may have and use the sense of humor without putting on the cap and bells. He may use it with the highest motives and for the noblest ends. It was said of Hosea Ballou, that "it was no uncommon thing for him when preaching to excite a smile; but usually it was done by some ingenious argument that would electrify every one present." His biographer adds: "It is not known that any person ever listened to one of his sermons who was not so impressed with his sincerity, dignity and earnestness, that the recollection of his occasional humorous sayings was held subsidiary and helpful to his main serious purpose. His mother-wit was sanctified. It served a divine mission in diffusing cheerfulness and health." We must always remember that wit and humor do not mean buffoonery.

It is difficult to understand how any one

can read many of the parables and other sayings of Jesus, and still believe the doleful tale that he "wept but never smiled." He saw the dancing lights as well as the deep shadows, the more genial and even ludicrous aspects of life, as well as its various phases of sorrow and sin, and all these furnished subjects for his discourse as well as illustrations for his teaching.

Let us now consider some of the ways in which the sense of humor in Jesus manifested itself.

I.

The sense of humor often tempered his rebukes. There was often sunshine on the cloud.

There were times, indeed, as we shall see, when he spoke with unmeasured severity, when his words fell like fiery hail, beating and burning the heads of offenders; but anon he spoke half smiling, half pitying, as if disposed to laugh at the very inconsistencies he censured. In this respect his spirit has been caught by Addison and Goldsmith, by Irving and Dickens. Richter says that

"no one has a right to laugh at men but he who most heartily loves them." Taine says of Dickens, "Before reading him we did not know there was so much pity in the heart." Jesus loved men, he pitied them, even while his eye detected and his words exposed their faults and foibles.

He had looked with pleasure (remembering his own childhood), upon the games of the boys and girls in the streets of Jerusalem; he thought of their whimsical complaints, as they played at weddings and funerals in the market-place. On one occasion, his severity mitigated by his sense of the ludicrous, he exclaimed, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another and saying, We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented." Everything had gone wrong. The others would not play fair. They would not dance when we wanted to play wedding; they would not be mourners when we wanted to play funeral. We have done all we could to please them,

but they are "too mean for anything." To the mind of Jesus, the people of that generation appeared to be making the same complaint. They were childishly dissatisfied with every divine messenger,— none could please them. "For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine,"— solemn, gloomy, austere; but they would have none of him. He mourned unto them, but they would not lament. They would not "play at funeral" with him. They turned away and said, "He hath a devil." Then came the Son of Man, bright and cheerful, "eating and drinking," but they would not dance to his piping. They pointed at him and said, "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!" It was impossible to please that generation.

If we place this passage side by side with the following from Goldsmith, we shall see at once that if there be humor in the latter, there must also be humor in the former. The subject is the reception accorded the Chinese philosopher who tried to please his friends by his demeanor upon the death of

an English sovereign: "I thought it at least my duty to appear sorrowful; to put on a melancholy aspect, or to set my face by that of the people. The first company I came amongst after the news became general was a set of jolly companions who were drinking prosperity to the ensuing reign. I entered the room with looks of despair, and even expected applause for the superlative misery of my countenance. Instead of that, I was universally condemned by the company and desired to take away my penitential phiz to some other quarter. I now corrected my former mistake, and with the most sprightly air imaginable entered a company where they were talking over the ceremonies of the approaching funeral. Here I sat for some time with an air of pert vivacity, when one of the chief mourners immediately observing my good humor desired me, if I pleased, to go and grin somewhere else; they wanted no disaffected scoundrels there. Fum, thou son of Fo, what sort of people am I amongst?" *Whereunto shall I liken this generation?*

There was a certain time when multitudes

followed Jesus, not knowing what they were about, but simply swept along by the enthusiasm of the moment. He saw that they understood not, so he turned and gave them this gentle caution: "Which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest, haply, after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish." Whoever comes after me and does not count upon bearing his cross, is in the predicament of this foolish tower-builder, —a ludicrous spectacle as he sits beside the unfinished structure, his materials exhausted, while all his neighbors, as they pass by, wag the head and point the finger. Such a spectacle as that will each one of you be who does not count the cost of discipleship. With such gentle strokes of humor did Jesus stay the thoughtless multitudes who imagined that their empty zeal was genuine loyalty. He set forth their conduct in terms that would most effectually impress upon them its folly,—in terms that appealed to their sense of the ridiculous.

In a sarcastic paragraph of his *French Revolution*, Carlyle speaks of the work of the National Convention thus: "In fact, what can be more unprofitable than the sight of six hundred and forty-nine ingenious men struggling with their whole force and industry, for a long course of weeks, to do at bottom this; to stretch out the old Formula and Law phraseology, so that it may cover the new, contradictory, entirely uncoverable thing? Whereby the poor formula does but *crack* and one's honesty along with it. The thing that is palpably *hot*, burning, wilt thou prove it by a syllogism to be a freezing mixture? This of stretching out formulas till they crack is, especially in times of swift change, one of the sorrowfullest tasks poor humanity has." Was it not this very formula-stretching that Jesus satirized in more playful vein, — this formula-stretching that existed in old times and that still exists, — when he said: "No man putteth a piece of new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then, both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old"? You can not patch up old

terms with new meanings. The new meaning agreeth not with the old term. "And no man putteth new wine into old wine-skins; else the new wine will burst the wine-skins and be spilled, and the wine-skins shall perish. But new wine must be put into new wine-skins, and both are preserved." The man who tries to put new senses into old words, new ideas into old formulas, is like a man who cuts up a new garment to mend an old; like one who puts wine not yet done fermenting into a skin whose capacity admits no further strain. He spoils his new coat and he loses his new wine.

With such illustrations as these, illustrations embodying a figure or comparison or situation essentially amusing, was Jesus wont to temper his rebukes.

II.

The sense of humor in Jesus enabled him to detect pretension, imposture, hypocrisy, and expose them to the derision of mankind.

If we should find in Dickens or Thackeray such pictures as Jesus has given of the

Scribes and Pharisees, they would strike us at once as the very quintessence of humor. "They go arrayed in long clothing, they love the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues." They are always posturing to attract attention. "They love greetings in the market-places, to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi." In their way, they are as much given to "deportment" as Mr. Turveydrop, when he says, "I suppose I must now go and show myself about town; it will be expected of me." When they pray, they do it standing in the synagogues or at the corners of the streets that all may see how pious they are; when they perform their deeds of righteousness, a trumpet is sounded before them, to make solemn proclamation; as who should say, "Will the public please take notice; I am about to drop a mite into this poor widow's hand." When they fast they put on "a sad countenance and disfigure their faces" with fictitious woe and weeping, "that they may appear unto men to fast." "See how I lay the dust with my tears," says Launce. Everything they did was done for effect;

nothing came from the heart. Their religion was the veriest sham. They had well-nigh reached the measure of South's ideal hypocrite, "who never opens his mouth in earnest, but when he eats or breathes." Well might Jesus say, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; *all things, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do ye not according to their works; for they say and do not.*" Does not this remind us of Pecksniff, "who was a most exemplary man, fuller of virtuous precepts than a copy-book; but some people likened him to a direction-post which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there."

III.

Not only did the sense of humor in Jesus enable him to unmask pretentious hypocrites, but also to expose the absurdities that the multitudes commonly practiced in the name of religion.

There are those, for example, who in prayer use "vain repetitions," thinking that they shall be heard for their "much speak-

ing." They estimate the efficacy of prayer by its quantity and not by its quality. They think that if they only keep at it long enough, if they only use multitudes of words, they will surely attract attention on high.

There are others who think that religion consists in the "washing of pots and cups and such like things" and they "lay aside the commandment of God." One of their representatives in modern literature is Dolly Winthrop, who tells Silas Marner about the letters "I. H. S." pricked upon the Christmas cakes: "I can't read 'em myself, and there's nobody, not Mr. Macey himself, rightly knows what they mean; but they've a good meaning, for they're the same as is on the pulpit-cloth at Church; an' if there's any good, we've need of it in this world."

It is curious how the superstition of externalism has affected many, even noble minds. Dr. Johnson once said of John Campbell, a political and philosophical writer, "Campbell is a good man, a pious man; I'm afraid he has not been inside of a church for a good many years, but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows he has good principles."

IV.

Jesus perceived the blunders of the well-meaning, but ignorant and ambitious, — such as the man who went to the wedding party without suitable garments, and was unceremoniously shown to the door; such as the obtuse people who, invited to a feast, always took the seats of honor and were as often courteously escorted to seats further down the table. When the "more honorable man" came, the host would say, "Give this man place," and the other would "begin with shame to take the lowest seat." Jesus saw these blunders, and we cannot believe that he was blind to their comical side. He must have felt that the mistake was a ludicrous one, even when he advised the stupid people who made it, "When thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say, Friend, go up higher; and then thou shalt have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee."

V.

The sense of humor in Jesus is still fur-

ther shown by his selection of characters for his parables and illustrations. How many of them are what we should call "odd sticks" to-day!

Could any one devoid of humor, or opposed to its use, have described such odd or eccentric people as the fool who thought that sand was as good a foundation for his house as rock; or the drowsy friend roused at midnight to lend his neighbor bread and scolding furiously at the annoyance? Then we have the shepherd's coward hireling who ran away from his flock when he saw the wolf coming; the foolish rich man; the unscrupulous steward who provided for himself by cheating his master; the three fellows who made such puerile excuses for absenting themselves from the king's banquet,— one was interested in a real estate transaction, another was dealing in stock, while the third had just "married a wife." Perhaps the characterization of all these excuses as puerile, may be too sweeping. This last case may be an exception. Having just entered the holy estate of matrimony, any plans this man might have formed before

that event were of course subject to revision. Let us not be too hard upon him. It may be that he rests under too heavy a load of censure. He may even be deserving of sympathy. He said — was there a suggestion of desperation in his words? — "I have married a wife and therefore I *can not* come." The king ought very likely to have exempted this man from his wrath; for he seems to say, "I should like to come, but — !"

Then there was the servant who, in his lord's absence, got above his business, assumed the master, became drunken in the company of roisterers, and beat his fellow-servants; but was at last put to shame by the sudden and unexpected arrival of his master. This servant was a veritable Jaques who, in the old play, assumed to be his master, the Duke, and who was likewise brought to grief by his master's return: "I must appear important; big as a country pedagogue when he enters the school-room with a-hem, and terrifies the apple-munching urchins with the creaking of his shoes. I'll swell like a shirt bleaching in a high wind;

and look as burly as a Sunday beadle when he has kicked down the unhallowed stall of a profane old apple-woman. Bring my chair of state!"

There are other characters, such as the shrewd laborer who, digging in a field, finds a hidden treasure and secreting it goes and buys the field; the unjust judge who finally, completely tired out, gives way in no very amiable mood to the widow's unceasing petitions for justice; the timid soul, who, fearing to use his talent, hid it in a napkin and buried it in the earth; the self-righteous Pharisee who recounts his good deeds before the Lord of the Temple and complacently congratulates himself that he is not as other men! "God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get!" Mr. Pecksniff once more! — so satisfied with himself, "so radiant with ingenuous honesty that Mrs. Lupin almost wondered not to see a stained-glass glory, such as the saint wore in the church, shining about his head!"

VI.

In the introduction, reference was made to the words of Mr. Shorthouse which suggested this investigation. This seems a fitting place to present the only example in which Mr. Shorthouse has carried out his own suggestion, — the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

"But is it true that there is no humor in the gospels? 'What strokes of nature, if not of humor,' to use Mr. Addison's words again, may we find in the story, let us say, of the Prodigal Son? What, in the light of the modern conception of humor, will come out of this?

Here, surely, there is no want of real life, of low life, even. Here is a wild young scamp, as like Tom Jones as heart could wish. Here is ingratitude, forgetfulness of parents, riotous living, taverns, harlots, what not? Then beggary, and feeding swine, and living upon husks. Then when evil living is found not to answer, penitence — like Tom Jones again.

And 'when he was yet a great way off

his father saw him,' along the stony road beneath the vine-clad hills. Who can tell how often the father's eyes had gazed longingly down the road since his son's figure, gay, reckless of the benefits just bestowed, accompanied by servants, eager for the pleasures of the world, had vanished from his sight? Now, at last, after so long waiting and looking, he sees in the far distance, a very different sight. He sees a solitary figure, worn and bent down, in rags, dragging on its weary steps; how could the old man's gaze expect such a sight as this? Nevertheless, his father knew him, 'and ran and fell on his neck.' He did not wait for any accents of repentance, nor did he enforce any moral precepts which might advantage posterity. 'He fell on his neck and kissed him.' Foolish old father!

Tom Jones is brought in. He goes to the bath. The familiar feeling of luxury comes over him once more. He is clothed in fine linen, and has a gold ring placed on his finger, the past seems an evil dream. Then the fatted calf is killed. The banquet is spread and there is festivity, music, and dancing-girls.

But suddenly, in the midst of his delight, some trouble passes over the old man's face; his eldest son is not in his place, and they bring him word that he is without and refuses to come in. Some perception of a neglected truth passes through the father's mind, and he rises and goes out. 'Therefore came his father out and entreated him.'

The eldest son has been out all day working in the vineyards; all his life had been one long performance of duty, taken for granted, and therefore unpraised and unrecognized. In how many households will silent witness be borne that this is real life — the gentle and obedient service overlooked — nay, more than this, the cross word or hasty temper where there is no fear that it will be returned.

'All these years have I served thee * * * and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.' I am a man like others, gayety and feasting are pleasant to me, as to them.

A look of perplexed, but growing insight comes into the father's face. 'Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.'

This is all very well, still he is conscious that there is something to be said for the eldest son, too. But his lost son — his wayward, and therefore loved son, is come again. 'It is meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive again.' We can see the pitiful, pleading look in the old man's eyes, — 'thy brother was dead.'

Yes, Addison must be right. Nature and humor cannot be far apart. The source and spring of humor is human life. Its charm consists, not merely in laughter or even in joy, but in the stirring of those sympathies and associations which exist invariably in the race; for we inherit a world-life and a religion, the earth-springs of whose realities lie, perchance, too deep for laughter, but not, Heaven be praised, too deep for tears."

Surely the examples given suggest an eye for the humorous in him who saw and described them. These illustrations were, indeed, used to convey moral truths, but they show how wide was the acquaintance of Jesus with all sorts of characters, and how he loved to use such as were out of the ordi-

nary; such as, to-day, we should at least call "peculiar." A recognition of this fact will help us better to appreciate and more thoroughly to enjoy those simple, yet wonderful parables, out of which the heavy hand of a severely literal criticism would crush all "touches of nature."

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V. PROVERBS AND EPIGRAMMATIC SAYINGS.

"Proverbs, must not be passed over in our enumeration, — proverbs, the philosophy of the common people; short, pithy, homely sayings that embody the concentrated essence of the common people's wisdom. It has been difficult to give a perfect definition of a proverb, so crowded is it with the life of shrewdness and experience; yet so easy and negligent is it, and saucy as it were. Its characteristic excellences are shortness, sense and salt. It is the wit of one man, the wisdom of thousands."— *Macbeth.*

PROVERBS AND EPIGRAMMATIC SAYINGS.

"The proverbialists occupy themselves with life in all its aspects. Sometimes they simply catch the expression of men, good or bad, or photograph their actions or thoughts; more generally they pass a verdict upon them and exhort or instruct men in regard to them. * * * Some of the proverbs have a certain flavor of humor."—*Davidson.*

"THE wise men of old," says Whipple, "have sent most of their morality down the stream of time in the light skiff of apothegm or epigram: and the proverbs of nations which embody the common sense of nations, have the brisk concussion of the most sparkling wit. Almost every sensible remark on folly is a witty remark. Wit is thus often but the natural language of wisdom, viewing life with a piercing and passionless eye." The object of the present study is to consider those proverbs and other epigrammatic sayings which distinctly contain the element of wit in some form or other, and which are so liberally scattered over the pages of the Bible.

I.—The Book of Proverbs.

In such an investigation, we naturally turn, first of all, to that great collection of proverbs, with which the name of Solomon has become identified. They do not, however, represent his genius alone, although we shall frequently use his name as representative of the whole class of philosophers. They are the productions of many wise men through many generations. They are, indeed, the outcome of the life of a whole people, put into definite shape by those who had insight sufficiently keen and power of expression sufficiently terse to formulate the lessons of human experience. "The wise men," says Canon Driver, "took for granted the main postulates of Israel's creed, and applied themselves rather to the observation of human nature as such, seeking to analyze character, studying action in its consequences, and establishing morality upon the basis of principles common to humanity at large. On account of their prevailing disregard of national points of view, and their tendency to characterize and estimate human

nature under its most general aspects, they have been termed, not inappropriately, the *Humanists* of Israel. Their teaching had a practical aim; not only do they formulate maxims of conduct, but they appear also as moral advisers, and as interested in the education of the young."

The Book of Proverbs is a perfect mine of cunning and glittering sentences, many of which are witty as well as wise, and none the less wise because they are witty. There are swords that pierce the hidden motives of men, and whips that lacerate the backs of their open follies and sins.

1. The Fool.

There is a personage, or more exactly, an assemblage of certain qualities, constantly held up to ridicule under the general title of *The Fool.* Ruskin says that "folly and sin are to some extent synonymous." The Fool in the Book of Proverbs is one who combines mental stupidity with moral obtuseness. He has a hard time of it at the hands of the proverbialists. "He that begetteth a fool

doeth so to his sorrow; the father of a fool hath no joy."

Foolish persons have always been noted for parading their folly, and sounding a trumpet to proclaim their lack of understanding. So Solomon says: "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul." "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness." "When he that is a fool walketh in the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool," — his scanty supply of sense is not enough to last him to the end of his journey. There is a modern proverb to the same effect: "He has not wit enough to last him over night." Everything the fool undertakes comes to grief. "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet and drinketh damage." "The labor of the fool wearieth every one, because he knoweth not how to go to the city." "The simple believeth every word, but the prudent man looketh well to his going." "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly." No discipline can

be too severe for the fool. "Judgments are prepared for scorners and stripes for the back of fools." "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." But Solomon is not sanguine that the most rigorous course will produce extraordinary results. "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool." "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth." "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?" One can almost see that picture — the fool wandering about the city with money in his hand, inquiring where a person in need of it might purchase a commodity of good common sense. "Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him." In many other proverbs is the fool gibbeted. "As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honor is not seemly for a fool." "The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools." "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, making a danger-

ous weapon, so is he that giveth honor to a fool." "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool." In one chapter Solomon describes a group of foolish persons. "For three things the earth is disquieted and for four which it can not bear; for a servant when he reigneth"— the modern instance is the "beggar on horseback," — "and a fool when he is filled with meat; for an odious woman when she is married; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress." These four characters "play such fantastic tricks before high heaven," that whether the "angels weep" or not, the earth groans and is "disquieted." And yet Solomon seems to have found a more grotesque and incorrigible character than the fool: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." The contempt of the proverbialists for the class of persons here described was quite as strong as that of Dr. Samuel John-

son. When some one hoped that the good doctor might meet in heaven a certain person whose conduct had aroused his ire, he retorted with some warmth, "Madam, I am not fond of meeting fools anywhere."

2. *The Idler.*

How these writers love to castigate laziness! They toss the sluggard on all manner of sharp-pointed epigrams. "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." "The way of a slothful man is as a hedge of thorns,"— he walks as slowly and painfully as if avoiding thorns on either hand. "As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him." "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing." "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread; but he that followeth vain persons"— those who teach him that

there is any other way to success than honest industry, — "is void of understanding." "The slothful man says, There is a lion without; I shall be slain in the streets." "As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed." "The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth." Too lazy to eat! This is the very acme of indolence.

3. *The Babbler.*

These wise men recommend, in pithy terms, the judicious control of the tongue. They commend the value of silence. "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with." "It is an honor to a man to cease from strife, but every fool will be meddling." "Even a fool when he holdeth his peace is accounted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." This is the same idea which we

find, in more elaborate form, in Shakespeare:

"There are a sort of men, whose visages
Do cream and mantle like a standing pond;
And do a wilful stillness entertain,
With purpose to be drest in an opinion
Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit;
As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!'
Oh, my Antonio, I do know of these,
That therefore only *are reputed wise*
For saying nothing: Who, I am very sure,
If they should speak, would almost damn these ears,
Which, hearing them, would call their brothers fools."

In point of condensation, the wit of the proverb has the advantage. Coleridge relates an incident which illustrates that "even a fool when he holdeth his peace is accounted wise, and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." He once saw, at a dinner table, "a dignified man with a face as wise as the moon's." The awful charm of his manner was not broken until the muffins appeared, and then the imp of gluttony forced from him the exclamation — "Them's the jockeys for me!"

There is a passage concerning the tongue in the Book of James, full of sayings quite as terse and striking as any in the Book of Proverbs. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." "The tongue is a little member and boasteth great things; behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth." "Every kind of beasts and birds and serpents is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. * * * Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. * * * Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?"

This passage from James may be placed side by side with the familiar story of Æsop. His master, Xanthus, sent him to market to procure the best things it afforded. When the dinner hour arrived, Xanthus discovered that nothing but tongues had been provided. "What," he exclaimed in a rage, "did I not tell you to procure the best things the market afforded?" "And have I not obeyed your orders? Is there anything bet-

ter than a tongue? Is it not the bond of civil society, the organ of truth and reason, the instrument of our praise and adoration of the gods?" The next day Æsop was directed to go to the market and purchase the worst things it afforded. He did so and again purchased nothing but tongues. "What!" cried Xanthus, "tongues again?" "Certainly; for the tongue is surely the worst thing in the world; it is the instrument of all strife and contention, the inventor of law-suits, and the source of all division and wars; it is the organ of errors, of lies, of calumnies, and blasphemies."

"Therewith bless we the Lord and Father, and therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God; out of the same mouth cometh forth cursing and blessing."

4. *The Scold.*

To return to the proverbs. Solomon had some unhappy domestic experiences, and such proverbs as these may have been the outcome: "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without discre-

tion." "A continual dropping in a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her, hideth the wind." "It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman." "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." "It is better to dwell in the corner of a house top than with a brawling woman in a large house."

5. *The Power of Money.*

The proverbialists had been close observers of human nature, and of the ways of the world. "Hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of a man are never satisfied." "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry; but money answereth all things." "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." These wise men had seen much to justify the sharp arrows they shot at those "who crook the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift may follow fawning." "The poor is hated even of his own neighbor, but

the rich hath many friends." "Many will entreat the favor of a prince, and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts." "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men." There is an incident in the second Book of Kings, that exemplifies, with touches of humor, the truth of these proverbs. "And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, (king of Israel,) for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and *brought no present to the king of Assyria*, as he had done year by year." The king of Assyria is greatly shocked at this sign of disrespect. His feelings are outraged and wounded at receiving no present. It is suspicious, very suspicious! Let this Hoshea be looked to. The man who fails to bring the usual present is fit for "treasons, stratagems and spoils." There is no telling what evil he may be plotting. Surely there is "conspiracy in him." "Therefore, the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison." Solomon was right—"A man's gift bringeth him before great men," but the absence of it bringeth him into prison as a traitor!

6. *Miscellaneous.*

Many other examples of wit and wisdom might be given. Let us add a few miscellaneous ones. Solomon advises against making long calls. Busy men would do well to hang this motto up in their offices: "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor's house, lest he weary of thee and so hate thee." In Solomon's wide and varied experiences, there had evidently been occasional encounters with "bores."

It may sometimes be well to present a stern front to the slanderer: "The North wind driveth away rain, so doth an angry countenance a back-biting tongue."

Excellent advice this for those who indorse other people's notes: "Be not one of them that strike hands, or one of them that are sureties for debts; if thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee?" "He that hateth suretyship is sure."

There were those in that day, as well as in our own, who tried to beat down the price of an article by depreciating its qual-

ity: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he hath gone his way, then he boasteth." Donald G. Mitchell, in his charming book, *My Farm at Edgewood*, has a chapter on "Dickering" which is, in effect, an elaboration of the proverb last quoted. "Sometime or other, if a man enter upon farm life—and it holds in almost every kind of life—there will come to him a necessity for bargaining. It is a part of the curse, I think, entailed upon mankind at the expulsion from Eden, that they should sweat at a bargain. * * * If I were to take the opinions of my excellent friends, the purchasers, for truth, I should be painfully conscious of having possessed the most mangy hogs, the most aged cows, the scrubbiest veal, and the most diseased and stunted growth of chestnuts and oaks with which a country-liver was ever afflicted. For a time, in the early period of my novitiate, I was not a little disturbed by these damaging statements; but have been relieved by learning on further experience that the urgence of such lively falsehoods is only an ingenious mercenary device for the sharpening of a bargain."

II.—Epigrammatic Sayings from other Sources.

The epigrammatic sayings of the Bible are not confined, as we have already seen, to the Book of Proverbs. We find them elsewhere. Hosea says of idolaters, "They have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind." Micah declared of the mercenary prophets, "He that putteth not into their mouth, they even declare war against him." At the same time princes and judges are so corrupt, that "the best of them is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge."

Jeremiah charges against the people, "As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses of deceit." "Can the Ethiopian," he asks, "change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" and adds, "Then can ye also do right who are accustomed to do evil." This is equivalent to the proverb of another people: "Though you feed milk to a young snake, will it leave off its habit of creeping under the hedge?"

"Can a maid forget her ornaments or a

bride her attire?" asks Jeremiah; "yet my people have forgotten me days without number." "Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." "As the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches and not by right, shall leave them in the middle of his days, and at the end shall be a fool."

Isaiah admonishes the people, "Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it; so is Pharoah, king of Egypt, to all who trust in him," — a saying which calls to mind the message Jesus sent to Herod, "Go, tell that fox." To those who trusted in the prowess of the Egyptians, Isaiah declares, "Now, the Egyptians are men and not God; and their horses are flesh and not spirit." He assures the people that the time will come when names shall be used with greater discrimination,— "The vile person shall no more be called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful."

Job says: "For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt." And it is Job who has given us the common expression, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth."

David says of the hypocrite: — "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, but they were drawn swords." "Man that is in honor and understandeth not, is like the beasts which perish." "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Of the wicked the psalmist exclaims: "Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely." Recalling an incident of Israel's journey through the wilderness, he gives his opinion of the transaction Aaron tried to disclaim: "They made a calf in Horeb and worshipped the molten image. Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass!" "Fools, because of their transgressions and because of their iniquities are afflicted." He says of those who gave him

pain, — the "ploughers who ploughed upon his back and made long their furrows," — "They shall be as the grass upon the house-tops which withereth before it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom."

Paul speaks of those "whose God is their belly, and whose glory is their shame;" and also of certain ones who "speak lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a red-hot iron." "Rulers," he says, "are not a terror to good works, but to evil." "If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself."

The Book of James has already been quoted in this chapter; but there is another passage of the proverbial or epigrammatic character that must not be omitted: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." The Veman proverb is very like this: "Whatever he

devoid of understanding may be reading, his virtue continues only so long as he is reading; even as a frog is dignified only so long as it is seated on a lotus leaf."

One of the best examples of the kind of wit we are now discussing is found in the account of King Asa's sickness and death. The writer of the Book of Chronicles says: "Yet in his disease he sought not unto the Lord, but to the Physicians;" and then adds with imperturbable gravity, "And Asa slept with his fathers." Referring to this passage, Professor Matthews says: — "It looks like a sarcasm on the medical practitioners of Palestine." There is something similar to this in Ecclesiastes: "Wisdom is good — with an inheritance," an ancient instance of "the old flag — and an appropriation."

III. — The Sayings of Jesus.

To this chapter belong many of the sayings of Jesus. He spoke in proverbs as well as in parables.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."

"Many are called, but few are chosen."

"The first shall be last, and the last first."

"A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and among his friends."

"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; he that exalteth himself shall be abased."

"Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

"Physician, heal thyself."

"Ye are the light of the world; a city that is set on an hill can not be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."

"Let the dead bury their dead."

"No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" There are several proverbs in other literatures very like this. The Russian:—"A pig came up to a horse and said, Your feet are crooked, and your hair is worth nothing."

The Bengal:—"The sieve said to the needle, You have a hole in your tail." The Chinese:—"Let every one sweep the snow before his own door, and not busy himself with the frost on his neighbor's tiles."

"Ye can not serve God and Mammon."

"A house divided against itself can not stand."

"Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?"

"For unto every one that hath to him shall be given and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

"Wheresoever the carcass is, there are the vultures gathered together."

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn again and rend you." Similar proverbs may be gathered from other sources. The Persian says, "It is folly to give comfits to a cow;" the Veman, "Though you anoint

an ass all over with perfumes, it feels not your fondness, but will turn again and kick you;" the Telugu asks, "What can a pig do with a rose-bottle?" the Tamul says, "Like reading a portion of the Veda to a cow about to gore you;" and again, "Though religious instruction be whispered into the ear of an ass, nothing will come of it but the accustomed braying."

"They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Such sayings of Jesus are true proverbs and instances of genuine wit.

Archbishop Trench says, "Any one who by after investigation, has sought to discover how much our rustic hearers carry away even from sermons to which they have attentively listened, will find it is hardly ever the course or tenor of the argument, supposing the discourse to have contained such; but if anything is uttered, as it used so often to be by the best Puritan preachers, tersely, pointedly and epigrammatically, this will have stayed by them while all the rest has passed away. Great preachers to the people, such as have ever found their way to

the universal heart of their fellows, have ever been great employers of proverbs." This principle helps to explain why, in the case of Jesus, "the common people heard him gladly."

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VI. REPARTEE.

"He that can define, he that can answer a question so as to admit of no further answer, is the best man. Jesus spent his life conversing with humble people on life and duty, in giving wise answers, showing that he saw at a larger angle of vision, and at least silencing those who were not generous enough to accept his thoughts."—*Emerson.*

REPARTEE.

"And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."—*Matthew.*

THE present chapter brings us to the subject of Repartee. Of this form of wit, Professor Matthews says, "Nothing is more admirable, nothing more quickly enlists our sympathies, than this perfect command and quick, instantaneous concentration of the faculties, when a man is taken at a disadvantage and has to repel an insinuation or an insult at a moment's warning. That felicity of instantaneous analysis which we call readiness, has saved thousands of men from mortification or contempt. The dextrous leap of thought by which the mind escapes from a seemingly hopeless dilemma is worth more than all the logic and learning of the world." "The impromptu reply," says Moliere, "is precisely the touchstone of wit."

The pages of the Bible are sometimes enlivened by sharp repartees. The men of old time, the men of the Hebrew nation, understood the power of the quick and flashing answer, as well as more modern generations. Johnson and Foote and Sheridan might have found it by no means easy to hold their own in Judea. It is very likely that their powers would have been put to the severest test.

I.

Turning to the pages of the old Testament, we find many striking examples.

Ben-hadad sends word to the king of Israel, threatening to destroy his army. The king of Israel replies, "Tell him, Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Amaziah desired war with Jehoash. He sends to him saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." Jehoash simply responds to the presumptuous challenge, "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying,

Give thy daughter to my son to wife. And there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon and trod down the thistle."

Job retorts upon Zophar, after a wearisome recital of dreary commonplaces intended for comfort, "No doubt but ye are *the* people, and wisdom will die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" To the speech introduced by these words, Eliphaz sharply replies, "Art thou the first man that was born? or wast thou made before the hills? Hast thou heard the secret of God, and dost thou restrain wisdom to thyself? What knowest thou that we know not? What understandest thou which is not in us? With us are both the gray-headed and very aged men, much elder than thy father." Upon this latter sentiment Elihu expresses himself when he finds opportunity to put in a word; "Great men are not always wise, neither do the aged understand judgment."

Indeed the Book of Job abounds in sharp speeches and replies as cutting as the speeches.

they answer. The sufferer obstinately refuses to accept their theory of his affliction or to adopt the remedies his friends propose. "Ye are forgers of lies," he exclaims, "ye are physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace, and it should be your wisdom." In response to this appeal, Eliphaz becoming piqued proceeds to administer consolation with the lash: "Shall a wise man utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? Should he reason with unprofitable talk or with speeches wherewith he can do no good?" "I have heard many such things," cries the wretched Job, "miserable comforters are ye all. If your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you; but I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief."

There were some word-battles between Sanballat and Nehemiah while the latter was trying to build the walls of Jerusalem, and the former was doing his best to hinder the enterprise. "Come," says Sanballat, "let us meet together in one of the villages in

the plain of Ono,"—let us be friendly, let us have a pleasant visit together, — "but he thought to do me mischief." The crafty Sanballat did not take the builder of Jerusalem napping. Nehemiah replies, "I am doing a great work so that I can not come down; why should the work cease whilst I leave it to come down to you?" Are your wishes of such mighty importance, O Sanballat that I should leave the Lord's work? Must the building cease that I may gratify your whim? Go to, Sanballat, go to; I can not come down. My work is great and noble; thou art a trifler and hypocrite! In precisely this vein was Spurgeon's reply to the pious bore who sent up word, "Tell him a servant of the Lord wishes to see him." It was Saturday afternoon, and Spurgeon replied, "Tell him I am busy with his Master!"

Sanballat will have at him again: "It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu said it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel; for which cause thou buildest the wall that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem,

saying, There is a king in Judah; and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together." To this tissue of falsehoods manufactured by the mendacious Gashmu, Nehemiah flashes back with indignation, "There are no such things as thou sayest, but thou feignest it out of thine own heart." Nehemiah comes very near giving what Touchstone would call the "lie direct," and he gives it without the qualifying "If."

Robert Collyer has the following comment upon Gashmu, who was quoted by Sanballat as authority for the charge that Nehemiah was going to set up for a king: "This only, this one thing is left: A good man was doing a good work with all his might, and bad men tried to hinder him. They tried to hurt his person. Gashmu was above that. He was none of your common rowdies. Sanballat and Tobiah might do that, but not Gashmu; yet Gashmu will sit there and nurse his dislike, and be glad to hear the petty stories that float like thistledown through the neighborhood against the inno-

cent man; words are twisted and turned to meanings Nehemiah never thought of, and Gashmu hopes they are true; he wishes they were true; the wish is father to the thought, and he believes them. * * * So Gashmu has permitted his prejudices to grow into a lie. Gashmu is to live thousands of years for one purely false assertion, and to be the representative man of unprincipled gossips and narrow bigots as long as the world stands."

Another illustration. When the woman, in time of famine, appealed to the King of Israel as he passed by, "Help, my lord, O King," he turned upon her with the somewhat grim rejoinder, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?" Her case was hopeless, if the Lord could do nothing.

Although the resemblance is not very strong, this incident suggests a story of Michael Angelo. It calls to mind the way in which he took revenge upon Biagio di Cesena. This courtier ventured to criticise his Last Judgment. With a swift stroke he turned the Minos of the fresco into a like-

ness of his critic. Biagio complained to the Pope. "Where has he placed you?" inquired the Pontiff. "In Hell," said Biagio. "I am sorry," replied the Pope; "If it had been in Purgatory, something might have been done, but in Hell I have no jurisdiction."

II.

Examples of prompt and keen retort are not confined to the Old Testament. When we turn to the New Testament, we find additional illustrations.

When Paul was making his defence before the Council, he said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." This declaration of innocence offended the High Priest Ananias, and he commanded those who stood by, to smite the speaker on the mouth. This raised the indignation of Paul, and with the swiftness of an arrow he transfixed the Priest, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall; for sittest thou to judge me after the law and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" This was

understood as a bolt of invective by those who heard it, for they asked in alarm, "Revilest thou God's High Priest?" The answer of Paul was a still more subtle sarcasm: "*I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest.*" There was nothing in the conduct of the man to betoken the dignity of his office. God's High Priest must surely be fair and impartial. God's High Priest would never counsel violence. The mistake, Paul would imply, was perfectly natural and excusable.

There is a story of John Randolph not unlike this. Indeed, the sarcasm is the same in spirit and purpose. Paul admitted that "one must not revile God's High Priest," but *he did not perceive that the High Priest was present.* The coarse, loud, ill-tempered person who commanded to smite him on the mouth could not be High Priest! The following was the occasion of Randolph's sarcasm: During the winter of 1834 a member of the House, to whom he was much attached, died. His place was taken by a young man, vain and ambitious, who began his career by making a bitter

attack on Mr. Randolph. No reply was made by the latter. Several days passed, when a question came up in which he was deeply interested, and he delivered a very earnest and impressive speech. As he closed, he said, "I should not, Mr. Speaker, have returned to press this matter with so much earnestness, had not my views possessed the sanction and concurrence of my late departed friend, *whose seat, I lament, is now unhappily vacant.*"

How skillfully, in the story of the young man who had been healed of his blindness, does the subject of the cure parry the thrusts of the synagogue authorities! "Give God the praise," they exhort, "we know that this man is a sinner!" "Whether he be a sinner or no," says the young man, "I can not tell; one thing I know that whereas I was blind, now I see." Thus repulsed, they begin again. "What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes?" He replies, "I have told you already, and ye did not hear; wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples?" Stung to the quick, they revile him, "Thou

art his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses, but as for this fellow we know not from whence he is!" Thoroughly aroused, the young man sends home to them a final thrust: "Why herein is a marvelous thing that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes? Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing!" Abuse and excision alone remain to the rulers of the synagogue. "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" And they cast him out. Excommunication is the sole answer of priest-craft and bigotry to reason.

III.

To many readers it may seem impious to say that under the head of Repartee we must classify many of those words of Jesus

with which he cuts through the sophistry of opponents and disentangles himself from the webs that are woven about him. Let it be remembered, however, that we are dealing with his utterances simply as literature; with their religious significance, we are not now concerned. We are discussing the sayings of Jesus as we would the sayings of Johnson or Goldsmith.

One of the most striking instances is found in the controversy over exorcism. When the scribes who came down from Jerusalem charged, "He hath Beelzebub and by the prince of the devils casts he out devils," he quickly reduced the accusation to an absurdity: "How can Satan cast out Satan? If he rise up against himself and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end." He goes further — "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?"

There was one occasion, however, when Jesus himself seems to have been vanquished by a swift rejoinder. When the Syro-Phenician woman came to him in behalf of her daughter, in order to test her faith he said,—

"Let the children first be filled, for it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs." "Yes, Lord," she answered, "yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." These words came from a bright intellect as well as from a trusting heart. Jesus appreciated the keenness of the reply no less than the confidence it expressed. "*For this saying* go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter." "For once," says Macbeth, "Jesus was refuted and that by his own figure; and he wished to be refuted."

How we enjoy such a dilemma as the one in which he placed the chief priests and the scribes and the elders! They asked him, "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee authority to do these things?" "I will also ask of you one question," says Jesus, "and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things — the baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me." "And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say

of men,—they feared the people; for all men counted John that he was a prophet, indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We can not tell." "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

Another time "came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread?" How quick and effective the reply: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" Nothing could be said in response. The question was absolutely closed. The disciples violate your tradition? Very good; but what does your tradition violate? Can we not see his opponents, falling back beaten, knitting their brows, taking counsel together, planning some overwhelming defeat for this impudent young heretic? What Thersites said of Ajax would well apply to them: "He bites his lips with a politic regard, as who should say, There were wit in this head an' 'twould out; and so there is, but it lies as coldly in

him as fire in a flint, which will not show without knocking."

When the woman poured the spikenard on the head of Jesus, Judas, the virtuous Judas, forsooth! made objection. "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence *and given to the poor?*" Why not, indeed,—for Judas is custodian of the poor fund. "Judas," returns his Master,—and there was pathos as well as rebuke in the words,—"Judas, the poor ye have with you always, and whenever ye will, ye may do them good." This was the first time Judas had ever manifested any solicitude for the poor. "But me, ye have not always." Judas was silenced; but he began to brood revenge. Soon he stole out and went to the chief priests. He had not secured the price of the spikenard, but he would indemnify himself by selling his Master!

With what relish do we read the trenchant replies of Jesus to the Scribes and Pharisees and Herodians who had leagued to "entangle him in his talk." Easily as Samson broke the green withes, did he break the verbal fetters they forged. "In

the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage!" "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." What can be more admirable viewed simply as repartee, — as illustrations of the "dexterous leap of thought by which the mind escapes from a seemingly hopeless dilemma?" If one were to read such fragments of Gospel history for the first time, without the idea that he must attach a solemn and awful meaning to every word, how would he delight in these intellectual contests and hail the genius of the victor!

After the besiegers, in the preceding incident, had exhausted their fruitless ingenuity, Jesus turns upon them with the question, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?" "The Son of David," they feebly mutter. "How then doth David call him Lord? If David call him Lord, how is he his son?" That ended the controversy. The combined forces of theology and politics retired in confusion, evidently looking, as Dickens said of the portraits of the Dedlock family, "as if they did not know what

to make of it." They had lost the battle. One can imagine the evangelist who afterwards wrote the account, almost chuckling with inward satisfaction, as he recalled the scene and recorded the result: "And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day ask him any more questions."

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VII. WIT AND LOGIC.

"Who would say that truth ought to stand disarmed against falsehood, or that the enemies of the faith shall be at liberty to frighten the faithful with hard words or jeer at them with lively sallies of wit, while the Christians ought never to write except with a coldness of style enough to set the reader asleep?"—*Augustine.*

WIT AND LOGIC.

"I was not gone far before I heard the sound of trumpets and alarms, which seemed to proclaim the march of an Enemy; and as I afterwards found was in reality what I apprehended it. There appeared at a great distance a very shining light, and in the midst of it a person of most beautiful aspect; her name was *Truth*. On her right hand, there marched a male deity, who bore several quivers on his shoulders, and grasped several arrows in his hand. His name was *Wit*."—*Addison*.

In her essay on Heine, George Eliot writes: "Every one who has had the opportunity of making the comparison, will remember that the effect produced on him by some witticisms is closely akin to the effect produced on him by subtle reasoning which lays open a fallacy or absurdity; and there are persons whose delight in such reasoning always manifests itself in laughter. This affinity of wit with ratiocination is the more obvious in proportion as the species of wit is higher and deals less with words and with superficialities than with

the essential qualities of things. Some of Dr. Johnson's most admirable witticisms consist in the suggestion of an analogy which immediately exposes the absurdity of an action or proposition; and it is only their ingenuity, condensation and instantaneousness which lift them from reasoning into wit." The opinion of George Eliot has been shared by others. Pitt declared that "all wit is true reasoning," and Rogers says that "wit is truth." A French writer has observed that "reason needs to be armed with the terrible epigram." And even solemn John Milton writes of Plato's dialogues, "There is scarce one of them, especially wherein some notable sophister lies sweating and turmoiling under the inevitable and merciless dilemmas of Socrates, but he that reads, were it Saturn himself, would be robbed of more than a smile."

There are in literature abundant examples of the condensed logic of wit, — the logic that exposes a fallacy, answers an objection and demolishes an argument, without resorting to major and minor premise and formal conclusion. One or two of these may pave

the way to the main purpose of this chapter. "Where was your Protestant Church before Luther?" asked a Catholic of Wilkes. "Did you wash your face this morning?" said Wilkes. "I did, sir." "Where was your face before you washed it?" The logic of wit as employed by Dr. Johnson, is referred to by George Eliot. On one occasion it was debated whether a clergyman who had five years before been guilty of some grave sin should be reinstated. Johnson inquired whether the man had repented. It was admitted that he had. "Then," said Johnson, "if he has repented, is he not good enough to go to heaven?" "Certainly." "Why, sir, then there is no objection. A man who is good enough to go to heaven is good enough to be a clergyman." Johnson denounced Lord Bolingbroke in the following immortal analogy: "Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward; a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality, a coward because he had not resolution enough to fire it off himself, but left half-a-crown to a beggarly Scotchman to draw the trigger after his death."

A certain clergyman who had been addicted to bawling and roaring in the pulpit said, "I once thought it was the thunder that killed, and know now that it is the lightning that does the execution. I mean to thunder less and lighten more." Sir Thomas Overbury punctures certain pretensions thus: "The man who has not anything to boast of but his illustrious ancestors, is like a potato—the only good belonging to him is underground." Thompson, of the *Westminster Review*, defended the Radicals against the attacks of the Whigs in this manner: "Noah was a Radical when, hearing the world was to be drowned, he went about such a common-sense proceeding as making for himself a ship to swim in. An antediluvian Whig would have laid together half-a-dozen sticks for an ark and called it a 'virtual representation.'"

The principle that underlies these instances is obvious. The form may vary but in every case there is an analogy that serves all the purposes of formal logic,—"an analogy which immediately exposes the absurd-

ity of an action or proposition." The writers of the Bible understood and employed the same principle.

I.

One of the best examples of its use is found in Nathan's parable. He goes to David and tells him: "There were two men in our city; the one rich, the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had brought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and with his children; and it did eat of his own meat and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd to dress it for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for the man that was come unto him." Such an action is so atrocious that it kindles David's wrath. He little suspects the purpose of the wily prophet. "As the Lord liveth," he cries, "the

man that hath done this thing shall surely die! And he shall restore the lamb four-fold because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Beware, David, beware! This Nestor-prophet, this Nathan of the subtle wit and keen-edged tongue hath digged a pit for thee and thou hast fallen into it. Swiftly the prophet smites the bewildered king with the conclusion, "*Thou art the man!*" Could a volume of reasoning have so impressed David with the enormity of his crime as this simple "analogy" of Nathan?

A similar instance is found in the first book of Kings. Ahab the king of Israel had allowed the Syrian general, Ben-hadad, to escape. One of the prophets, determined to rebuke him, disguised himself and sat by the wayside, waiting until the king should pass by. "And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king and said: Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle, and behold a man turned aside and brought a man unto me and said, Keep this man; if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life or else thou shalt pay a

talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there he was gone." Ahab does not suspect the snare of the prophet. What would my lord, the king, decide? Shall thy servant pay the forfeit? "And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hath decided it." And he made haste, removed his disguise, and said to the king: "Thus saith the Lord: *Because thou hast let go out of thine hand a man whom I had appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people.*" Ahab has judged himself. No wonder he was vexed. "And the king of Israel went to the house heavy and displeased." Nothing so disconcerts one as the recoil of his own logic.

Let us place side by side with these illustrations one or two pieces of the same kind of reasoning from Shakespeare. The Court Fool endeavors to show Lear his own pitiful lack of wisdom in giving away his kingdom to his daughters: —

"Fool.—Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns.

"Lear.—What two crowns shall they be?

"FOOL.—Why, after I have clove the egg i' the middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i' the middle and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt; thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away."

Upon another occasion the following dialogue occurs: —

"FOOL.—Canst thou tell how an oyster makes his shell?

"LEAR.—No.

"FOOL.—Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

"LEAR.—Why?

"FOOL.—Why to put his head in; not to give it away to his daughters and leave his horns without a case."

Lear is so stung with the sense of his folly by these "analogies" of his jester that he exclaims in rage and bitterness, "I shall forget my nature!" It is the argument of Nathan, "Thou art the man."

Upon the same principle, but in a different way, the Psalmist reasons with those who "slay the widow and the stranger and murder the fatherless," and who say, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." Thus he argues: "Under-

stand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? *He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?*"

Under this head must we also place the judgment of Solomon, when the two women came before him, each claiming the living child. "Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth and thy son is dead; and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead and mine is the living one. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other. Then spoke the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her heart yearned upon her son, and she said, O my Lord, give her the living child and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither thine nor mine, but divide it. Then the king answered and said, Give her (the first) the living child, and in no wise slay it; she is the mother thereof." Solomon had to use a sharp argument, but he settled the controversy.

II.

The "suggestion of an analogy that immediately exposes the absurdity of an action or proposition," was the favorite method of argument with Jesus.

He spun no metaphysical cobwebs, he used no long chains of linked propositions; it is no irreverence to say that his quick wit was his main reliance. In a sentence or two, with a simple, homely figure, he reduced to an absurdity the conduct he censured and the proposition he opposed.

On one occasion he was asked, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" "What man shall there be among you," he answered, "that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and bring it out? *How much more, then, is a man better than a sheep?* Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day."

At another time the same subject came up. Because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, the ruler of the synagogue was filled with indignation and made a very grotesque spectacle of himself. He stormed, scolded,

and roared to the people, "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Jesus answered: "Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, *be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?*" The indignant ruler had to smother his wrath. "And when he (Jesus) had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed." The people enjoyed their confusion, and evidently applauded the sharp-witted young prophet who had silenced the fault-finding tongues of the rulers. "All the people rejoiced for the glorious things that were done by him!"

The Scribes and Pharisees were once murmuring and complaining that he mingled with publicans and sinners, and even condescended to eat with them. "And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance!"

When the Pharisees and Sadducees desired that he would show them a sign from heaven, he answered and said unto them, "When it is evening, ye say that it will be fair weather for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to-day; for the sky is red and lowering. O, ye hypocrites, *ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*" He uses essentially the same argument for a similar request: "When ye see a cloud rise out of the West, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower, and so it is. And when ye see the South wind blow, ye say, There will be heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, *ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?*" Says Geike, "With biting irony, he turned on them in a few brief, incisive sentences. * * * An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign of the approach of the Kingdom of God, while it is blind to the signs around that the Messiah must come, if the nation is not to perish."

In a similar manner he shows how ridicu-

lous are the doubts of those who fear that God will not answer prayer. "If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will ye give him a stone?" How this must have arrested the attention of his auditors; how they began to listen, curious to know what was coming next. "Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?" Now they exchange glances as much as to say, "No, no; surely we would not do that!" But only for a moment. The expectant faces are again turned upon the Great Teacher. "Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" "No, no!" and now they are eager for the conclusion: "*If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*" It is the climax of absurdity for you to think that you are better than God, and will do more for your children than the Great Father will do for his children!

The disciples of Jesus came to tell him that the Pharisees are offended at some of his sayings. His only reply is, "Let them

alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

When he charges the Pharisees with tithing mint, anise, and cummin, while neglecting judgment, mercy and faith, he stamps their conduct with an "analogy" that makes them ludicrous forever, "Ye blind guides *which strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.*"

At dinner, he was rebuked by his host for permitting a penitent woman to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hairs of her head. "Simon," calmly returned the guest, "I have somewhat to say to thee." "Master, Say on." Jesus then proceeds to impale him upon the following question: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed him five hundred pence, the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" Simon understands whither the question tends, and slowly and reluctantly comes his answer: "I — suppose — that —

he — to — whom — he — forgave most." "Thou hast rightly judged." Yes, Simon, but thou hast condemned thyself and justified the woman.

The story of the vineyard and its application are similar to Nathan's parable. "There was a certain householder which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all, he sent unto them his Son; saying, They will reverence my Son. But when the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on the inheritance. And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

This is the story. Jesus turns to the

Pharisees: "When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto these husbandmen?" Priests and Pharisees are moved with indignation. This is horrible; it almost exceeds belief. Those husbandmen were monsters of ingratitude and wickedness! The Pharisees answer: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

Fatal answer for you, O Scribes and Pharisees! "Therefore I say unto you, *the Kingdom of God shall be taken from* YOU, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." There is a touch of humor in Matthew's description of the manner in which the real object of this story dawned upon the minds of the hearers. "And when the Pharisees had heard his parable, *they perceived that he spake of them.*" Are we not irresistibly reminded of Falstaff, when the fairies in the forest turned out to be flesh and blood, "I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass?" Do we not feel about many of these condensed arguments of Jesus,

as Milton did about the "sophist sweating and turmoiling under the inevitable and merciless dilemmas of Socrates," that "he who reads, were it Saturn himself, would be robbed of more than a smile?"

Let us add by way of comparison, a passage from the Athenian Master. Here is a fragment of dialogue upon the enslaving power of money.

"Come, now, and let us reason with the unjust who is not intentionally in error. 'Sweet sir,' we will say to him, 'what think you of things esteemed noble and ignoble? Is not the noble that which subjects the beast to the man, or rather to the god in man? and the ignoble that which subjects the man to the beast?' He can hardly avoid saying Yes, — can he now?"

"Not if he has any regard for my opinion."

"But if he admit this, we may ask him another question,— How would a man profit if he received gold and silver on condition that he was to enslave the noblest part of him to the worst? Who can imagine that a man who sold his son or daughter into slavery for money, especially if he sold them into

the hands of fierce and evil men, would be the gainer, however large might be the sum which he received? And will any one say that he is not a miserable caitiff who sells his own divine being to that which is most atheistical and detestable, and has no pity?"

This selection will enable us to see that the method commonly used by Socrates was essentially the method that Jesus so frequently employed.

III.

When we pass on to other portions of the New Testament, we find examples of the same kind of reasoning in James and Paul.

Most admirably does James show the futility of faith without works. "What shall it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and hath not works? Can faith save him? If a brother and sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

The class of people referred to by James are aptly described by Fielding in the character of Peter Pounce. "Sir," said Adams, "my definition of charity is a generous disposition to relieve the distressed." "There is something in that definition," answered Peter, "which I like well enough; it is, as you say, a disposition to do it, and does not so much consist in the act as in the disposition to do it. But, alas! Mr. Adams, who are meant by the distressed? Believe me, the distresses of mankind are mostly imaginary, and it would be rather folly than goodness to relieve them." "Sure, sir," replied Adams, "hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, and other distresses which attend the poor, can never be said to be imaginary evils." "How can any man complain of hunger," said Peter, "in a country where such excellent salads are to be gathered in almost every field? or of thirst, where every river and stream produce such delicious potations? And as for cold and nakedness, they are evils introduced by luxury and custom. A man naturally wants clothes no more than a horse or any other

animal; and there are whole nations who go without them." Peter Pounce would have said to the "brother or sister naked and destitute of daily food," "*Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled.*"

The declaration of James that "faith without works is dead," is illustrated in the sayings of others also:

"Sweet words, empty hands."—*Telugu.*

"Kindness, but no milk."—*Urdu.*

"Though they are brothers, their pockets are not sisters."—*Turk.*

"It is not by saying Honey, Honey, that sweetness comes into the mouth."—*Ib.*

"His words leap over forts, his feet do not cross the threshold."—*Telugu.*

"If you do not ask me for food and raiment, I will care for you as my own child."—*Ib.*

Equally admirable is that comparison of Paul in which he likens the Church to the human body and shows the folly of jealousy and schism: "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?"

Very pleasantly, but very effectually, does he remind those who professed to "speak with tongues" a sort of supernatural language, in the early Christian assemblies, that it was "better to speak five words with the understanding than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." An illustration serves his purpose. "Even things without life, giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in sound, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air."

Paul maintains the right of those who establish and teach churches, to be supported by those churches. It was a right upon which he did not always insist in his own case; but he fought for it as a great principle. "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this: Have we not the power (the right) to eat and drink?" The objector would admit this. Very well!

"Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? * * * If we have sown unto you in spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap of your carnal things? * * * Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? They which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." There is no gainsaying this argument. The "analogy" is unanswerable.

Already once or twice in this chapter, reference has been made to Socrates and his method. Much of the following passage would apply equally well to Jesus or James or Paul: "He generally begins with some question, apparently so simple, so stupidly simple, and at such a distance from the field of discussion, that his opponent often hesitates whether most to admire the docility or wonder at the stupidity of the querist, and with a complacent smile, half of pity, half

of contempt, promptly replies. Other questions succeed faster and faster, more and more difficult, and gradually approaching, in one long spiral of interrogations, the central position in which the unhappy sophist's argument stands. He now finds it impossible to escape, and confounded, perplexed and irritated, discovers that he is compelled to admit some palpable contradiction to his original assertions, and this too by means of those simple and innocent premises which he had so unsuspectingly granted. He feels himself within the coils of a great logical boa-constrictor who binds his folds together tighter and tighter till the poor sophist is absolutely strangled."

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VIII. THE USE OF RIDICULE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates; in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity? And the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof!"—*Solomon.*

THE USE OF RIDICULE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

"The oldest jibe in literature is the ridicule of false religion."—*Emerson.*

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall hold them in derision."—*Psalms.*

In the Bible, the elements of wit and humor are effectively employed in dealing with the sins of men. Evil doing, in its various motives and manifestations, is denounced, rendered repulsive, made ghastly and terrible, and when everything else has been done, it is exhibited as grotesque and ludicrous. Sin is the great absurdity of the universe. Were it not so tragic, it would shake the very heavens with laughter.

One of the old English poets has these lines: —

"He who does not tremble at the sword,
Who quails not with his head upon the block,
Turn but a jest against him, loses heart;
The shafts of wit slip thro' the stoutest mail.
There is no man alive that can live down
The inextinguishable laughter of mankind."

With this fact the writers of the Bible were

quite as well acquainted as are the writers of modern times. They took advantage of it for the same purpose.

"Of this we may be sure," says Hazlitt, "that ridicule fastens on the vulnerable points of a cause, and finds out the weak sides of an argument; if those who resort to it sometimes rely too much on its success, those who are chiefly annoyed by it almost always are so with reason, and can not be too much upon their guard against deserving it."

Into hearts impervious to all else, the writers of the Bible drove the javelins of ridicule.

The Sluggard.

If anything could make a lazy man feel uncomfortable, it would be such thorns as those Solomon has planted in his pillow:—

"I went by the field of the slothful,
And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding;
And lo! it was all grown over with thorns,
The face thereof was covered with nettles,
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.
Then I beheld and considered well,
I saw and received instruction:
'A little sleep, a little slumber,

A little folding of the hands to sleep.'
So shall thy poverty come as a robber,
And thy want as an armed man.

* * * * *

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard,
When wilt thou rouse thee out of thy sleep?"

The Unfaithful Friend.

If anything could make an unfaithful and deceitful friend, one who professes much in times of prosperity and performs nothing in times of need, ashamed of himself, it would be such a comparison as we find in the book of Job:—

"My brethren are deceitful, like the brook
As the channel of brooks that pass away,
They become turbid from ice,
The snow hides itself in them.
At the time they are poured off, they fail;
When it is hot they are consumed from their place.
The caravans along their way turn aside;
They go up into the wastes and perish.
The caravans of Tema looked,
The companies of Sheba hoped for them;
They were ashamed that they had trusted,
They came thither and were confounded."

The friends of Job were like streams in the early spring, when melting ice and snow

filled their channels, and the waters were not needed; but in the heat of summer, when fainting caravans looked for refreshment, dry and dusty.

The Drunkard.

If anything could move a drunkard to forswear his cups and lead a sober life, it would be such a sarcastic description of him as that which follows: —

"Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contention?
Who hath complaining? Who hath wounds without cause?
Who hath redness of eyes?
They that tarry long at the wine,
They that go to try mixed wine.

* * * * *

Thine eyes shall behold strange things,
And thy heart shall utter froward things,
Yea thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea,
Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast."

The poem closes with a terrible thrust. After the folly of the drunkard has been described, his physical and mental condition pointed out — the red eyes, the strange things seen in de-

lirium, the incoherent babbling, the unsteady gait, the surrounding perils, — the devotee of strong drink is made to exclaim, "*When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again!*" Knowing its effects, suffering in mind and body from his potations, such is the incorrigible stupidity of the wine-bibber that he no sooner wakens from his drunken slumber than he goes forth to seek again the source of his wretchedness!

The Idolater.

Nowhere is the use of ridicule by the writers of the Old Testament displayed to better advantage than in their treatment of idolatry. Against this sin they brought to bear the most potent weapons of their wit. None of the resources of expression were left untried. Witness the withering irony with which Elijah mocked the frantic priests of Baal: "And it came to pass that at noon Elijah mocked them and said, Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked." No finer bit of irony can be

found in any literature. Indeed, we may regard it as the most perfect specimen extant of this species of wit.

Jeremiah exclaims, "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes and their priests, and their prophets, *saying to a stock, Thou art my father, and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth.*"

The Psalmist thus speaks of the gods of the heathen:

"They have mouths, but they speak not;
Eyes have they, but they see not;
Noses have they, but they smell not;
They have hands, but they handle not;
Feet have they, but they walk not;
Neither speak they thro' their throat."

Having thus described the senselessness and impotence of the gods of the heathen, he adds:

"They that make them are like unto them,
So is everyone that trusteth in them."

In a similar vein Jeremiah ridicules the idols: "For the customs of the people are vain; for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the work-

man, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they can not go. *Be not afraid of them; for they can not do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.* * * * The stock is a doctrine of vanities."

Isaiah satirizes the idolaters in this fashion: "They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed that trust in graven images, they that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods. Hear ye deaf, and look ye blind that ye may see. Who is blind but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect (in his own estimation), and blind as is the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not. * * * Who among you will give ear to this and hearken and hear for time to come?"

Ezekiel declares that, on account of their idolatries, the people have become as worthless as a withered vine. Nothing useful

can be made out of it. It is only fit for the fire. "What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work? Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work; how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned? Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

There is an elaborate piece of sarcasm in the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah: "He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest; he planteth an ash and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn; for he will take thereof and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it and baketh bread." The tree

which this idolater takes has grown up as any other tree, and after it is cut down, it is devoted to the same ordinary uses. Yet out of that very tree, "he maketh a god and worshippeth it; he maketh a graven image, and falleth down thereto."

The prophet repeats and amplifies, "He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh, he roasteth roast and is satisfied; yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire; and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image; he falleth down unto it and worshipeth it, and prayeth unto it and saith, Deliver me, for thou art my God."

Then he concludes: "And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, *I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh and eaten it; and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?*" The idolater does not see, does not "consider" what an abject simpleton he is to make a god out of

the same material with which he bakes bread and roasts meat. It is as if the prophet should say, "What sort of a god is that, O Israel, with which you do your broiling and baking?"

Robert South comments on this passage: "With one part he furnishes his chimney, with the other his chapel. A strange thing that the fire must consume this part and burn incense to that! As if there were more divinity in one end of the stick than in the other; or as if it could be painted and graven omnipotent, or the nails and hammer could give it an apotheosis."

The fatalistic excuse which the people make for their idolatries and other sins, is thus disposed of by Jeremiah: "Behold ye trust in lying words that can not profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes?"

Refuges of Lies.

Isaiah charges the rulers of the people with forsaking the word of the Lord, and substituting for his truth false maxims and iniquitous precepts. They refuse to obey the divine commands, and lead their subjects also into rebellion. They have adopted other rules of life than those delivered by the prophets of Jehovah,— other national policy than that promulgated from above. In their overweening pride and self-confidence, they look with disdain upon the requirements of God. Isaiah represents them as saying, "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." But the prophet warns them that their fancied security shall be broken up. "Judgment also will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place. And your covenant with death shall

be disannuled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it." He pauses a moment, after this strain of invective, and then sarcastically describes the insufficiency of their refuges by another figure, ludicrous enough, that of a man trying to stretch himself upon too short a bed, and to cover himself with too narrow a blanket. "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."

False Prophets.

Ezekiel tells us that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Son of Man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God: Woe unto the foolish prophets that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the desert. * * * They have seen vanity and lying

divination, saying, The Lord saith; and the Lord hath not sent them." These prophets were endeavoring to soothe the people, to cover up their sins, to dissipate their fears of retribution. "They have seduced my people, saying, peace, when there is no peace." Then Ezekiel describes their work. They are like foolish masons who build a wall with mortar that will not hold the stones together,—"untempered mortar!" Can such work last? Can such a structure stand? "Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar that it shall fall. There shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hail-stones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it. Lo! when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" Did ye not boast of your mortar? Did ye not promise the people that it would hold? Alas for you, O prophets! Alas for your work! "The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it; to wit, the prophets of Israel which prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and which see visions of peace for her, and there is no peace, saith the Lord."

Most contemptuously does Isaiah speak of the false prophets: "The Lord will cut off from Israel, head and tail, branch and root, in one day. The ancient and honorable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, *he is the tail.*"

The King of Assyria.

Isaiah ridicules the high and mighty pretensions of the King of Assyria. That monarch boasts of his achievements. He takes the credit of all to himself. He wears the glory alone. "By the strength of my own hand, I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent; and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man." Falstaff could not proclaim his own prowess, in more bombastic style. "I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have 'scaped by miracle: I am eight times thrust through the doublet; four through the hose; my buckler cut through and through; my sword hacked like a hand-

saw. I never dealt better since I was a man." Now let the Assyrian resume his parable: "And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." Falstaff will match him again: "There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head, but I am thrust upon it. Well, I can not last for ever; but it was always yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common. * * * I would to God my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is!"

The prophet, after allowing the Assyrian to sound his brazen trumpet, turns upon him, and sarcastically reminds him that he is simply a tool, a rod, a staff, in the hands of the Lord, and that he has of himself accomplished nothing: "*Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?* as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift itself up as if it were no wood!"

The King of Babylon.

One of the most powerful passages of invective in any literature is that in which Isaiah pictures the fall of the King of Babylon.

He begins—"How hath the oppressor ceased!" Then he sets forth the joy of the earth itself over the discomfiture of him who "smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke." All creation is glad. "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet; they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us." This is the state of things on earth.

There is commotion in the lower world, there is mockery of the humiliated monarch as he descends among the shades. "Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming; it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations."

The shadowy, ghostly company gather about the fallen potentate and taunt him: "Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols; the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground which did weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will be like the Most High! Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms, that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof?"

Then the prophet concludes: "All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of

those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit, as a carcass trodden under feet!"

It is truthfully remarked that "keen thrusts and tingling ironies will rouse the slumbering, startle the stolid, shame the profligate, and set the thoughtless to thinking. While it is true that ridicule is not the test of truth, it is equally certain that it is only by ridicule that many dull-witted and sin-steeped persons can be made to see and feel the truth. It would be well for mankind in general, if all could be made to feel that wickedness is as contemptible as it is hateful. There is a stupidity in sin, a thick, rhinoceros skin of insensibility, which only the feather-winged arrows of wit can pierce. Iniquity has a pachydermatous hide, and can feel only when coals of fiery ridicule are laid upon its back, and blown by the breath of laughter."

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IX. THE USE OF RIDICULE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

"If our Savior himself never laughed, it is difficult to believe that the bystanders did not laugh, or at least smile, when he tore the mask from the hypocritical pharisees who laid heavy burdens on men's shoulders which they themselves would not move with their fingers, and devoured widows' houses, even while for a pretence they made long prayers."—*Matthews.*

THE USE OF RIDICULE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

"Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."—*Paul.*

THE writers of the Old Testament who used the glittering lances of wit against the foes of truth and righteousness, had worthy successors in evangelists and apostles, and in Jesus himself. These men were indignant at hypocrisy and wrong-doing; they looked with scorn upon the swelling pretensions of the religious leaders; they expostulated with affectionate earnestness and severity with their own brethren who suffered themselves to be led astray. Indignation is not necessarily wrong or unchristian. The faculty of indignation is an essential part of human nature, and when aroused against evil its operations are beneficent. It in no wise diminishes the reverence we feel for Jesus, that he made a scourge of cords and lashed the traders and money-changers from the temple!

Ruskin says, "There is no black horse in the chariot of the soul. One of the driver's worst faults is starving his horses; another is not breaking them early enough; but they are all good. Take, for example, one usually thought of as wholly evil — that of anger, leading to vengeance. I believe it to be quite one of the crowning wickednesses of this age, that we have starved and chilled our faculty of indignation, and neither desire nor dare to punish crimes justly."

This faculty of righteous wrath when it takes shape in irony, ridicule, sarcasm, invective, is the mightiest foe of vanity, hypocrisy, pretension, corruption, and vice. By its sword do they perish. The teachers and writers of New Testament times, did not disdain to use in their work every instrument of power known to the human mind. From their own stand-point, at least, they had many false notions and customs to combat; they had the ignorant, prejudiced, officious and fault-finding to deal with; they were harrassed by narrow and persistent opponents; they had to do battle at every step. They might have exclaimed with a

modern writer, "Let us be thankful that we have in wit a power before which the pride of wealth, and the insolence of office are abased; which can transfix bigotry and tyranny with arrows of lightning; which can strike its object over thousands of miles of space, across thousands of years of time; and which through its sway over an universal weakness of man, is an everlasting instrument to make the bad tremble and the foolish wince."

The Choice of the Jews.

There is an excellent piece of quiet sarcasm in John's account of the trial of Jesus. He first gives us Pilate's conclusion in these words: "And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews and saith: I find no fault in him at all; but ye have a custom that I release unto you one at the passover; will ye therefore that I release unto you the king of the Jews?" Pilate is willing; he pronounces Jesus innocent; but the crowd clamor and refuse. "Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but

Barabbas." John closes the account with an inoffensive looking sentence, but one so full of bitter satire, that we can not help thinking of the time when he wished to call down fire from heaven. Jesus is an innocent man—so pronounced by the governor—but the Jews cry out for his blood. They want Barabbas released. And who is Barabbas? Who is this popular idol? Who is the man that the people prefer to Jesus the upright and spotless? With a rapier-like thrust, John pierces the heart of that iniquitous choice, "*Now Barabbas was a robber.*" It is a stroke worthy the "Son of thunder."

The Weakness of Pilate.

But think not, O Pilate, that thou shalt escape. The same hand that cast the first javelin, will also send one to pierce thy heart. In the next chapter, John tells us how, up to a certain point, Pilate sought to release Jesus. He was convinced of his innocence, and did not wish him put to death. But there is a weak spot in Pilate's nature, and John points it out with infallible

precision. Pilate is not the man to stand for the right at personal sacrifice. When his own interests are at stake, he will permit injustice and cruel wrong to others. Why does he deliver Jesus to the cross? John is determined that all the world shall know. "The Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar." My lord Pilate is not proof against this insinuation. He can not face the possibility of losing his office. "*When Pilate, therefore, heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth.* * * * Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified." John has stamped Pilate as a weak, vacillating and selfish ruler; and his portrait, marked with these features, has been transmitted to all ages.

Paul and his Detractors.

Perhaps none of the great characters of New Testament times were so beset by foes of all kinds as was Paul. He has himself assured us that he was often in perils from

his own countrymen, and in perils from false brethren. He was denounced by priests and scribes, and opposed by upstarts in the very churches he had founded. In replying to arguments and meeting objections he sometimes showed his mastery of more than one form of wit,—although the form he most frequently used was irony.

By many his preaching was characterized as "foolishness." There was nothing in it to commend it to the Jews who "required a sign," or to the Greeks, "who sought after wisdom." "Very well," is his reply, "foolish it may be, but after all it has accomplished more than either Jew or Greek has been able to do for the world. 'Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' What has it achieved? Where are its monuments? 'For after that the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of (just such) preaching (as mine) to save them that believe.' This foolishness has lifted men from vile and sinful lives into righteousness and honor. Have your own

way about it, O Greeks and Jews; I will be accounted a fool if you will, and am willing to let my words be stigmatized as folly; but you will find that 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things that are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are.' I accept the low estimate you put upon me and my work, but I triumph over you and your work, however exalted. Results shall determine. This is glorious folly!"

In writing to the Corinthians, he says of certain members of the church who thought that in spiritual things they were superior to himself, "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, *not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.*"

To those thus puffed up, he addresses himself in the following ironical strain: "Now ye are full, now ye are rich; ye have

reigned as kings without us; and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last. * * * We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised."

He denounces certain teachers who were sowing the seeds of discord among his churches, as "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Such teachers as these pronounced Paul a fool and did everything to bring his work into contempt. "Very good," says Paul to the Corinthians, "receive me then as a fool," and then proceeding, with his favorite irony, "For ye suffer fools gladly, *seeing ye yourselves are wise!*"

How scathing is his rebuke to those who misrepresented his doctrine: "We be

slanderously reported, and some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come! — whose condemnation is just." This is his only answer to evil tongues.

It is conceded by the best authorities that Paul did not write the Epistle to the Hebrews, but there is a passage in that letter not unlike him, — the rebuke to those who ought to be strong, manly and intelligent Christians, but who have not yet gotten out of their swaddling clothes: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is but a babe. But *strong meat belongeth to those that are of full age*, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Similar to this is Paul's treatment of the Corinthians when they were divided in their allegiance, some claiming to belong to one teacher and some to another. First Paul

himself had been there and taught among them in that broad and liberal spirit which always characterized him. He made very little of forms and ceremonies, and very much of charity and brotherhood. Then came Peter who was always more narrow than Paul, but very intense. Paul was a broad river, Peter a mountain torrent. Peter never completely freed himself from the bondage of the Jewish system, and he insisted upon some of the things that Paul discarded. Soon a party was formed. Some thought, no doubt, that Paul was too far away from the Jewish creed, that he was not strict enough, that it was perhaps safer to take Peter as a guide; so while some said, "I am of Paul," others said, "I am of Cephas." Then came Apollos who is described as being "very eloquent." When he stood up to speak, many said, "He beats both Paul and Peter; I am of Apollos." So there were "envyings and strifes and divisions." Paul ridicules the Corinthians for these childish quarrels, and says that he must still speak to them as to "babes." "I have fed you with milk and not with meat; for

hitherto ye were not able to bear it, *neither yet now are ye able!*"

Examples from other Apostles.

The epistle of James that has furnished illustrations for some of the preceding chapters, shall yield one for this, in its notice of a grave abuse that existed in the early churches, and that has not entirely died out of modern churches.

"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly, a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place (Take this high-priced and fashionable pew, where you can listen to the gospel in luxurious ease, and at the same time dazzle the eyes of those in neighboring pews with the latest fashions), but say to the poor, Stand thou here, or sit here under my foot-stool (or go up in the gallery), are

ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?"

Peter silences certain ones who complained of persecution, by saying, "If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye (that is nothing to complain of), but let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men's matters (if any one of you suffers in such a character, he deserves the lash)." In either case, there is nothing to justify your outcry.

He also denounces certain ones who have forsaken the right way and gone astray as "wells without water, clouds without rain that are carried of a tempest." They "speak great swelling words of vanity, promising liberty while they are themselves the slaves of corruption." And then he fastens the reproach of their apostasy upon them with what Falstaff would call a "most unsavory simile," — "It is happened to them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Such are those who turn back to error from the paths of truth.

In much the same strain does Jude write to the same class: "These are spots in your feasts of charity; clouds without water, carried about of the winds; trees whose fruit withereth without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever!"

John wrote to the Laodiceans: "I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot; so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked!"

The Laodiceans needed the familiar prayer of Burns:

> "O wad some power the giftie gie us,
> To see oursel's as ithers see us;
> It would frae mony a blunder free us,
> And foolish notion!"

They needed a look into the glass of Lao, which revealed the blemishes of the soul, how fair soever the exterior.

Christ's Use of Invective.

Even more severe than his apostles in his use of denunciation, was the Great Master himself. In his controversies with the recognized religious leaders of his day, he heaped coals of fire upon their claims and teachings and practices.

"Ye leave the commandment of God and hold fast to the tradition of men," he says to the Scribes and Pharisees; and then adds, with terrible irony, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition." Surely, when the commandments of God were placed side by side with rabbinical glosses, they were in an extremely cruel position!

No passage of invective, in any literature, is more crushing than this: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass

sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves. * * * Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. * * * Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Blind Pharisees! cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also! Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. * * * Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, for ye are as graves which appear not, and men walk over them and are not aware of them."

But not only the leaders, but the people also, fall under his lash. "The men of

Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold a greater than Solomon is here! When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return to my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation!"

Upon another occasion, he upbraided the cities in which he had wrought and preached. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have

been done in you, they had a great while ago repented sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell!"

Does it seem strange that such language should have come from the lips of Jesus? Should we not rather have expected it from the stern Baptist, his forerunner, who denounced the "brood of vipers" that came to his baptism? Is it inconsistent with that spirit of love which we believe to have been the distinguishing characteristic of Christ? But love is not mere invertebral amiability or moon-faced complacency. By as much as love is strong and true, by so much does it seek, at any cost and by any means, to remove the faults and follies of its object. If the lash be needed, the lash it will take. "He who has never experienced the affectionate bitterness of love," says F. W. Robertson, "who has never known how *earnest* irony and passionate sarcasm may be the very language of love in its deepest, saddest

moods is utterly incapable of even judging this passion!"

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Here the writer's task ends. The subject may be capable of much more elaborate treatment; it would be claiming too much to suppose that these chapters exhaust it. The writer trusts, however, that he may have suggested a line of study to others, as it was first suggested to him. The poetry, the dramatic portions, the oratory of the Scriptures, are unsurpassed. Viewed simply as a literary work, the Bible is the most interesting in the whole realm of letters. It becomes increasingly interesting, as its great human elements are recognized. Over history, biography, and most serious discourse, play the soft gleams of healthful humor and the lightning-like bolts of sarcasm and wit. The book touches human nature at all points. The more we view it as "literature," the less as "dogma," the firmer will become its hold upon the heart of man.

That these fragmentary studies may help

some one to appreciate his Bible better and enjoy it more, is the writer's wish. He may also express, in closing, the hope that whoever has taken the trouble to read these pages may have found them free from that which he disclaimed at the outset—irreverence; as he believes them to be free from the other extreme, superstition.

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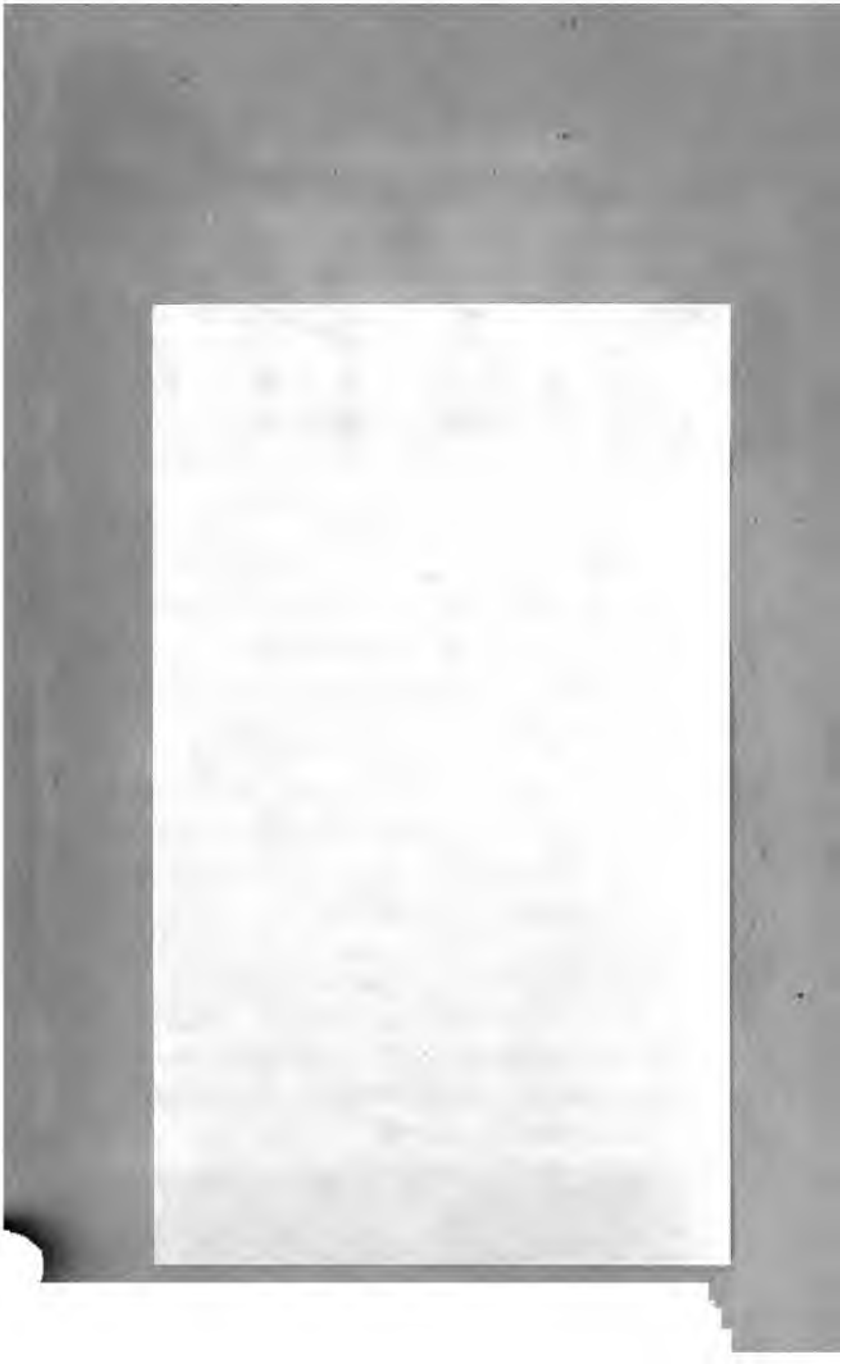

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